

# LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY



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VOLUME 59 • NUMBER 4  
DECEMBER 2019

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**The Word Endures: An Exegetical Analysis of  
the Doctrinal Controversies of the ELS**

**Preaching the Old Testament, Even If  
You Follow the One-Year Series**

**Ministering to Millennials: The  
Generation, the Culture**

**Pastoral Care and Christian Counseling:  
Role Differentiation and Partnership**

**Devotion on Matthew 5:13: You  
Are the Salt of the Earth**

**Sermon on Deuteronomy 18:18–19:  
The Greater Moses**

**Index to Volume 59**

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*The journal of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary*

# LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF..... Gaylin R. Schmeling  
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS ..... Nicholas D. Proksch,  
Timothy R. Schmeling  
LAYOUT EDITOR ..... Daniel J. Hartwig  
PRINTER ..... Books of the Way of the Lord

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# Foreword

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**A**S PART OF THE CENTENNIAL OF THE Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) in 2018, the Great Lakes Pastoral Conference requested an essay offering an exegetical analysis of the doctrinal discussions in the ELS. These discussions included church and ministry, the Lord's Supper, and the roles of men and women in the church. This summary, entitled "The Word Endures," was written by the Rev. S. Piet Van Kampen, who is pastor at Christ the King Lutheran Church in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

Preaching on the Old Testament has never been common in the Lutheran Church, and today many questions are arising concerning the validity of the Old Testament. Yet the Old Testament is the inerrant Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16), and Jesus told the Emmaus disciples that the Old Testament Scriptures spoke of Him (Luke 24:27). In the essay, "Preaching the Old Testament, Even if You Follow the One-Year Series," the Rev. Shawn Stafford speaks to the significance of Old Testament preaching. The Rev. Stafford is pastor of Hartland Lutheran Church in Hartland, Minnesota, and Manchester Lutheran Church in Manchester, Minnesota.

Jesus desires that the Gospel of salvation be proclaimed to all people. It is intended for every culture and society. It is meant for every age group. Therefore, we do well to research the different generations we serve so that we might serve them in the best way possible. This is the point of the essay, "Ministering to Millennials: The Generation,

the Culture,” by the Rev. Peter Heyn, who is pastor of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in San Angelo, Texas.

Christian counseling is a major task of the Lutheran pastor. In this field the pastor can at times receive assistance from Christian counselors. In this essay, “Pastoral Care and Christian Counseling: Role Differentiation and Partnership,” presented at the 2018 Circuit Visitors’ Conference, Dr. Joshua Mears points out how the assistance of a Christian counselor can be integrated with the responsibilities of a pastor. Dr. Mears is a counselor and Clinical Director of Minnesota for Christian Family Solutions.

Also included in this *Quarterly* is a devotion on the salt picture of Matthew 5:13 and a sermon comparing Moses and the fourth gospel.

– GRS

# The Word Endures: An Exegetical Analysis of the Doctrinal Controversies of the ELS

S. Piet Van Kampen  
Pastor, Christ the King Lutheran Church  
Green Bay, Wisconsin

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*“The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever”*—Psalm 119:160.<sup>1</sup>

*“The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever”*—Isaiah 40:8.

**T**HE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD EXISTS because of doctrine. While much has been said of the synod’s historically Norwegian ethnicity and its shared affinity for the Bugenhagen Order (and rightly so), the Evangelical Lutheran Synod would not exist today if not for the clear teachings of Holy Scripture. It was for doctrinal reasons that the remnant of the Norwegian Synod minority, instead of celebrating a merger with other Norwegian and Scandinavian Lutheran church bodies, chose to worship quietly together on their own at Fairview Lutheran Church in Minneapolis.<sup>2</sup> They could not be a part of a church body that permitted false doctrine to sit side by side with the truth with regard to the doctrine of election by grace alone. Doctrine unified the small group that trudged from Lime Creek, Iowa across the border into Minnesota to organize a new synod (or better, reorganize the old synod). They declared the canonical books of

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1982). Where the Bible is quoted in English, unless otherwise noted, it will be from the New King James Version.

<sup>2</sup> Theodore A. Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill* (Mankato: Board of Publications, Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968), 76.



the Old and New Testament to be the only source and rule for faith and doctrine and the entire Book of Concord as its confession of faith.<sup>3</sup>

The synod's doctrinal character has persisted throughout its hundred-year history. As we celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, one cannot help but notice that the people of the synod care about the truth of God's Word. While other church bodies argue fiercely over how every dollar is spent, many of the controversies over the last hundred years in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod have been doctrinal. Church fellowship, the twin doctrines of the Church and the Public Ministry, the roles of men and women in the church, the timing of the real presence in the Lord's Supper—these are all doctrinal controversies, controversies over the teaching of God's Word. At the same time, the synod settled these controversies in our midst by returning to the Word of God. One of the wonders that members of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod are privileged to proclaim is how the Word of God has endured among us, even throughout the history of our doctrinal controversies.

This presentation intends to explore each of these controversies through the exegetical analysis of Scripture and will follow an intentionally inductive approach in doing so. For each controversy, one or two key Scripture passages will be explored in depth. The intent is that these key passages will provide a springboard to studying other relevant passages for the proper understanding of the doctrine in question. The presentation will also make use of the synod's own doctrinal statements in connection with each controversy.

That being said, this is an exegetical presentation, not a history paper. Some historical introduction will be necessary for each controversy, but the history is not the main thing. Especially with some of the more recent controversies, not a lot of written history exists to delve into the details of the controversy, save, perhaps, for minutes from pastoral conferences and synod conventions.

It also needs to be said that this is an exegetical presentation, not a doctrinal treatise. The biblical doctrines in question will be presented in their truth and purity, however, to treat these controversies in their true depth would be to require—at the minimum—an essay for each one. Not every point raised in each doctrinal statement will be raised in this essay.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

The ultimate goals of this presentation are practical. Hopefully it will serve as a useful instrument to help educate and instruct the members of our synod.

May God bless the study of His Word!

## I. The Doctrine of Church Fellowship

The old Norwegian Synod, founded in 1853, had enjoyed a blessed spiritual unity. Sadly, that unity did not last. Division arose over the doctrine of election in the 1880s, when F. A. Schmidt, the Norwegian Synod's seminary professor at Concordia, St. Louis, began teaching that sinful human beings are saved "in view of faith" (*intuitu fidei*) instead of salvation by grace alone. Schmidt's false teaching wound up dividing the Norwegian Synod and forcing it to withdraw from the Synodical Conference. The group that followed Schmidt (the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood) eventually joined with other churches to form the United Norwegian Lutheran Church (UNLC) in 1890.<sup>4</sup>

Riding a tide of growing Norwegian ethnic pride, along with a desire for union among Norwegian Lutherans, a new generation came to power in the Norwegian Synod. Under this new leadership, the Norwegian Synod voted on June 8, 1917 to merge with the UNLC (along with the Hauge synod) to form the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (NLCA—changing its name in 1946 to the Evangelical Lutheran Church).<sup>5</sup>

When these church bodies combined, however, they never resolved their doctrinal differences regarding divine election. They agreed to allow both conflicting doctrinal points of view to stand side by side. It was not true unity; instead, it was unionism—union at all costs, even at the cost of the truth. As a result, not everyone went along with the merger. A handful of congregations and pastors chose to establish their own church body, which eventually became the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, united together on the basis of God's Word. This "little Norwegian Synod" joined the Synodical Conference (WELS and LCMS) and enjoyed a blessed unity in Christian doctrine and practice.

Fast-forward a few decades into the 1930s. Another Synodical Conference church body, the LCMS, was looking for union with other Lutheran churches. At the invitation of the United Lutheran Church of America (ULCA) in 1935, the Missouri Synod entered committee

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<sup>4</sup> John M. Brenner, *The Election Controversy Among Lutherans in the Twentieth Century* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2017), 146, 150.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

discussions with the ULCA and the American Lutheran Church (ALC). In the past, both church bodies (ULCA and ALC) had demonstrated varying degrees of loyalty to the Bible's teachings; neither the LCMS nor WELS nor the ELS had found them compatible enough for joint fellowship. That status had not really changed, but the Missouri Synod had decided to participate in the talks anyway.<sup>6</sup> In the case of talks with the ALC, Missouri's behavior especially troubled the "little Norwegian Synod" because the ALC belonged to the American Lutheran Conference, a federation of church bodies of which the Evangelical Lutheran Church (the former NLCA) was also a member.

So, in 1936, the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church (what would later become the ELS) developed six theses on church union, which eventually were incorporated into an essay entitled, "Unity, Union, and Unionism" (frequently referred to as the "Triple U," even to this day). The essay was meant as an answer to the ULCA and to the Missouri Synod as to why talks of union where no doctrinal agreement exists were not helpful. As the Missouri Synod continued to pursue a unionistic path into the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, the essay was reprinted in 1967 as a partial explanation for why the ELS, and ultimately the WELS following suit, had to break fellowship with the LCMS and eventually leave the Synodical Conference.

### *Ephesians 4:3*

σπουδάζοντες τηρεῖν τὴν ἐνότητα τοῦ πνεύματος ἐν τῷ συνδέσμῳ τῆς εἰρήνης<sup>7</sup>

#### *Translation*

*sparing no effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;*

#### *Text Notes*

σπουδάζοντες	present active participle, nominative masculine plural	σπουδάζω do one's best, spare no effort, work hard <sup>8</sup>
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<sup>6</sup> Herbert J. Larson and Juul B. Madson, *Built on the Rock* (Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1992), 84.

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993). All Greek New Testament textual citations are from the 27th edition.

<sup>8</sup> Barclay M. Newman, Jr., *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1971). Unless otherwise indicated, in the "text study"

τηρεῖν	present active infinitive	τηρέω keep, observe, obey, pay attention to; keep under guard, keep in custody; keep back, hold, reserve; maintain, keep firm
ἐνότητα	accusative feminine singular	ἐνότης, ἡτος unity
συνδέσμων	dative masculine singular	σύνδεσμος, ου that which binds together, bond; chain or bundle

*“The Unity of the Spirit”*

The noun ἐνότης originates from ἐνός, the Greek word for “one,” indicating oneness or unity. Yet what is the nature of this oneness? It is a unity “of the Spirit.” Going on from verse three, verses four through six contain a reference to the Trinity, “one Spirit ... one Lord ... one God and Father of all.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the use of πνεύματος in verse three can also be safely understood as a reference to the Holy Spirit. This is important because the unity of Christians in fellowship with one another is not just a vague spiritual unity, but a unity in which the Holy Spirit plays a key role. The subjective genitive of “Spirit” informs the reader that this particular unity is one that the Holy Spirit Himself has created. True unity exists already between believers, worked by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit creates a specific kind of unity among believers. We see the same language of unity from verse three in verse thirteen, where “we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Unity between Christians consists of unity of faith and unity of true knowledge of Christ, which is understood as a true knowledge of Scripture. Paul further defines the nature and character of this unity among Christians in 1 Corinthians 1:10, where he pleads with a divided Corinthian congregation to “speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” This unity shows itself in a common confession of faith and in agreement with regard to the doctrines of Scripture, especially with regard to the manner in which God saves sinners.

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portions of the presentation this source is used, primarily to facilitate translation.

<sup>9</sup> Irwin J. Habec, *Ephesians: Amazing Grace* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1985), 77.

This unity of the Spirit results in a unified Holy Christian Church. Paul goes on in Ephesians 4:4–6 to point out the oneness that characterizes the Church: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” The one Holy Spirit creates one saving faith, which relies on a singular hope in Christ, and creates one body of believers.

This oneness is emphasized in Thesis I of *Unity, Union, and Unionism*:

Thesis I The spiritual unity of the Holy Christian Church, which is the body of Christ, is not dependent upon any such externals as a common organization or language, but alone upon the possession of the saving faith in Jesus Christ. True Christians will, however, “endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” Eph. 4:3; and will therefore also seek to establish and maintain church fellowship with all who are one with them in confessing the true faith.<sup>10</sup>

When one sees today’s world, with the ever-increasing godlessness and immorality that surrounds the Church, it is increasingly desirable for believers to want to band together into visible groups. The rationale for this is similar to that expressed by Benjamin Franklin during the American Revolution: “We shall all hang together; or we shall all hang separately.” People seek strength in numbers and long for validation and the sense that they are not alone in their struggles.

Yet that way of thinking falls into the trap of believing that true unity in faith and doctrine does not already exist among true Christians. It also leads people to the conclusion that unity in the church is something that human beings accomplish by themselves. “It is the Word of God alone that can build, support, and defend the Church.”<sup>11</sup>

The Church has always existed in conflict with the sinful world. Yet the Spirit-given function of visible churches is not to provide outward unity to the rest of the world. Rather, the visible church’s role is “the agency for administering the means of grace through which the Holy Ghost grafts branches on the vine, Jesus Christ.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, “Unity, Union, and Unionism,” Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1938, 1967, accessed March 16, 2018, <http://els.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/unity-union-and-unionism/>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Thesis I, par. 9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Only the Holy Spirit unites believers together by creating the common bond of true faith in Christ. The Spirit accomplishes this through the means of grace, gathering people around God's Word and Sacrament.

### *In the Bond of Peace*

In Ephesians 4:3, the word *συνδέσμῳ* literally refers to “the middle item that joins two or more things together,”<sup>13</sup> similar to the glue that joins together two pieces of wood. Figuratively, in this verse, the word refers to the thing that joins people together. In the case of the Christian Church, the thing that joins people together and connects them with one another is *τῆς εἰρήνης*, that is, “peace.”

“Peace” can be understood in any number of ways, but perhaps it is best to know what Paul means when he speaks of “peace.” Paul explores the nature of the peace that believers have earlier in his letter to the Ephesians, in 2:14–16:

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

The peace that binds believers is the peace of reconciliation to God, which Christ Himself accomplished through the cross. As it is written in Isaiah 53:5, “The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.” Jesus' sacrifice removed the state of enmity that existed between sinful human beings and God so that now, the Lord could establish a “covenant of peace” with them.<sup>14</sup> Part of that covenant included sending His Holy Spirit to create justifying faith in our hearts that trust in Christ's sacrifice for sin and His resurrection from the dead (see Ezekiel 36:24–28). As Paul says in Romans 5:1, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This peace is found in the Word of God (Acts 10:36).

This peace—the peace of reconciliation in Christ, found only in the Word of God—is the glue that binds the church together. Therefore, the

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<sup>13</sup> Timothy Friberg and Barbara Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), Entry 25528.

<sup>14</sup> Ezek. 37:26.

Word of God, and the Gospel message it contains, is the true unifying force between Christians.

Thesis II We acknowledge one, and only one, truly unifying influence and power in matters of both doctrine and practice, namely the Word of God; and only one God-pleasing procedure in striving for unity: That “the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as children of God lead holy lives according to it.”

Thesis III Through such teaching of the Word, unity and (when deemed desirable) union have been attained in the past. Examples: the early New Testament Church, the Lutheran Reformation, and the Synodical Conference.<sup>15</sup>

One of the examples of true unity and union cited in Thesis III of the “Triple ‘U’” is that of the early Christian Church. The Bible provides examples of both the *establishment* of church fellowship and the *blessings* of that fellowship. In Galatians 2, Paul relates the account of his first visit to Jerusalem following his conversion and the beginning of his preaching and teaching ministry. Peter, James, and John extended Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship only *after* they understood that they and Paul were preaching and teaching the same Gospel.<sup>16</sup> The only real basis for union is the true unity of the Spirit, true agreement in the doctrine of Scripture.

As far as the blessings of fellowship, Luke recounts in the book of Acts how believers, unified in the Gospel of Christ, lived in harmony with one another, not counting any of their possessions as their own, “but they had all things in common.”<sup>17</sup> The peace of Christ enabled Christians to be at peace with each other. This is why Paul, at the beginning of Ephesians 4, can call the church in Ephesus to walk “with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love.”<sup>18</sup> Christians can bear with one another in peace and unity because they know that Christ has already shown each of them far greater gentleness and longsuffering with regard to their faults. Christ establishes peace between man and God, but in doing so He also establishes peace between man and man.

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<sup>15</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, “Unity, Union, and Unionism.”

<sup>16</sup> Gal. 2:7–10.

<sup>17</sup> Acts 4:32.

<sup>18</sup> Eph. 4:2.

The gospel—and by that term is meant the pure Word of God—is the source of peace that is the glue that binds believers together. Therefore, any outward union among Christians that is not based on the unifying power of the Word of God is not a true union.

### *Endeavoring to Keep This Unity*

The Holy Spirit has granted believers a blessed unity in the bond of peace in Christ. So, what do believers do with this great blessing?

Σπουδάζοντες is an interesting word on account of the manner in which the Holy Spirit uses it. Few of the English versions do it justice. In the New King James Version, it is translated as “endeavoring”; in the English Standard Version it is rendered as “eager to.”<sup>19</sup> Habeck, in his commentary, states that σπουδάζοντες “implies intense effort, originally in hurrying, but then also in every other way.”<sup>20</sup> The word carries a similar meaning in Hebrews 4:11 and 2 Peter 1:10.<sup>21</sup>

Τηρεῖν has the general meaning of “guard” or “keep,” but possesses various shades of meaning depending on the context. Essentially, it can mean “keep in view” or “watch over,” to guard or protect, to preserve, or to maintain something. In connection to doctrine or commandments, it means obedience.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps an all-inclusive understanding of the term is best when it comes to the unity of the Spirit. Christians want to “keep” it—to guard it, protect it, maintain it, and live by it. It is noted that implied in this infinitive verb is the sense of keeping something which has already been given. One cannot “keep” what one does not already possess.

When you put the phrase together, σπουδάζοντες τηρεῖν, you have the exhortation to “make every effort to keep” the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. What does that effort and diligence look like in the life of the church? Obviously, it means that Christians exercise fellowship with one another. They continue in the Word of God together, partaking of the means of grace, administered in their truth and purity, living in peace with one another. “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’

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<sup>19</sup> *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Crossway Books/Good News Publishers, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> Habeck, *Ephesians*, 77.

<sup>21</sup> Heb. 4:11 “Let us therefore **be diligent** to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.” 2 Pet. 1:10 “Therefore, brethren, **be even more diligent** to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.”

<sup>22</sup> Friberg and Friberg, *Analytical*, Entry 26653.



doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”<sup>23</sup> This is the “unit concept” of fellowship, where Christians demonstrate their common bond by worshipping together (joint prayer, preaching, and communion).

Individual Christians also strive to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace by recognizing the responsibility of each to testify to the truth of Scripture. Peter instructs believers, “Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.”<sup>24</sup> Paul encourages Timothy, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”<sup>25</sup>

Members of the body of Christ endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit by seeking others like ourselves who are sincerely interested in proclaiming the saving truth of Christ and instructing them in the ways of the Lord more fully, much the same way that Aquila and Priscilla found Apollos and trained him in the gospel.<sup>26</sup> This also ought to be the guiding principle behind efforts at fellowship between synods or church bodies.

Thesis IV Inter-synodical committees can be useful in promoting Christian fellowship only: a) when various groups or synods have given each other evidence of an existing unity in spirit and it remains merely to establish the fact of such unity and arrange for public recognition of that fact; b) or where it is clear that those in error sincerely desire to know “the way of God more perfectly.” Acts 18:26.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, members of Christ’s body also strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit by watching themselves and keeping their own weaknesses in check (like our desire for external union at all costs). Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 10:12, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” Christians are to never forget that being part of the body of Christ is totally a gift of God’s grace. The unity of the Spirit is nothing for which a sinner can claim credit. On the other hand, in Romans 11:17–21 the hearer is reminded that the privileged status of being a member of the Christian church is something that can be lost,

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<sup>23</sup> Acts 2:42.

<sup>24</sup> 1 Pet. 3:15.

<sup>25</sup> 2 Tim. 4:2.

<sup>26</sup> Acts 18:26.

<sup>27</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, “Unity, Union, and Unionism.”

that “if God did not spare the natural branches [the Israelites], He may not spare you [Gentiles] either.” This is important to remember when efforts are being made to find doctrinal agreement with other churches and church bodies.

Thesis V Where evidence of unity is lacking or where it is clear that those in error do not sincerely desire to know “the way of God more perfectly” but such committees nevertheless are elected to confer with them with the view to church fellowship, there is grave danger that the work of the committees will result in indifferentism and in compromise of Scriptural doctrine and practice.<sup>28</sup>

“Watch and pray,” Jesus said, “lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”<sup>29</sup>

Finally, believers in Christ make every effort to protect the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace by watching out for and avoiding those who teach falsely.

Thesis VI Scripture warns us clearly and emphatically against entanglements with errorists (Romans 16:17, Titus 3:10, I Timothy 6:3–5). Any reluctance to heed these warnings and commands of Scripture is unionism already conceived in the heart, which if allowed to develop, will result in full-fledged unionism, as history also attests.<sup>30</sup>

Near the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul urges the brethren to “note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.”<sup>31</sup> To place oneself willingly in the vicinity of false teaching is the exact opposite of keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The instructions are straightforward. Yet, to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is not as easy as it looks. The whole point of using a word like *σπουδάζοντες*—“make every effort,” “be diligent,” “endeavor,” “be eager to”—is because keeping unity in the church is hard! It is hard to proclaim the truth, boldly confessing Christ as the only way of salvation. It is hard to live in peace with fellow Christians all the time, especially when disagreements take place. It is hard to be always on the watch for errorists. Christians can only “hasten” or “strive”

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Matt. 26:41.

<sup>30</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, “Unity, Union, and Unionism.”

<sup>31</sup> Rom. 16:17.

to do it because Christians will never be able to do it completely or perfectly. For evidence of that, all one needs to do is start counting the various Christian denominations that exist in today's world.

In times when keeping the unity of the Spirit hurts—or when a believer has failed to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace—it is important to remember that the Bride has her Bridegroom. The Church can turn to Christ Jesus. In His “High-Priestly Prayer” Jesus said, “Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.”<sup>32</sup> In Jesus we have a Savior who prays for the unity of His Church! Jesus prays a prayer that He Himself answered, uniting us by washing us in His own blood, cleansing us from every stain in the waters of our baptism, and dressing us in His robes of righteousness. Rest assured, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, Christ will bring His Church into perfect unity when He returns at the last day.

As God's people in Christ, we strive to protect and maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. That means we join in fellowship by worshiping together—gathering together for prayer, for hearing God's Word and receiving the Sacraments. That also means we speak the truth of God's Word in love, seeking out those who believe the truth of God's Word as we do, instructing those who desire to know the way of God more perfectly, and at the same time watching out for and avoiding those whose teachings run contrary to the truth of God's Word. The power to do all of this comes from Christ who justified us and who sends His Holy Spirit to sanctify and preserve us as His Holy Christian Church.

## II. The Doctrine of the Church

The 1940s and 1950s were tough times for Lutheranism and the Synodical Conference (primarily ELS, WELS, and LCMS). One of the doctrines discussed during this period was the doctrine of Church and Ministry. Though different church bodies advanced various views, at that time these views were not considered to be divisive of fellowship.<sup>33</sup>

There were two predominant viewpoints especially on the doctrine of the Church, one primarily coming from the WELS and the other from the Missouri Synod. The pastors and congregations of the ELS had divided opinions. “The old Norwegian Synod and also the ELS

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<sup>32</sup> John 17:11.

<sup>33</sup> Craig A. Ferkenstad, *Proclaim His Wonders: A Pictorial History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod* (Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2017), 277.

had not delved into the matter so closely.... To a degree, it seems that those trained at Luther Seminary [Norwegian Synod] tended toward the WELS view, while those trained after 1917, at St. Louis held the Missouri position."<sup>34</sup> At the heart of the controversy was this matter: Is Scripture's definition of the Church broad enough to include things like synods and denominations? Or does Scripture limit the visible Church to the local congregation? In a nutshell, Missouri considered the Biblical definition of the visible Church to be the local congregation while Wisconsin held a broader view of the doctrine of the Church.

After decades of internal discussion, the ELS approved a doctrinal statement in 1980 written by Pres. Wilhelm Petersen, entitled: "The Doctrine of the Church." The statement consists of seven theses summarizing what the Evangelical Lutheran Synod believes, teaches, and confesses about the Church.

### *Matthew 16:18*

κάγω δέ σοι λέγω ὅτι σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ πύλαι ᾗδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς.

#### *Translation*

*"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this bedrock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her."*

#### *Text notes*

Πέτρος	nominative masculine singular proper	Πέτρος, ου Peter
πέτρα	dative feminine singular	πέτρα, ας rock, solid rock, stone
οικοδομήσω	1st person singular future active indicative	οικοδομέω build, erect
ἐκκλησίαν	accusative feminine singular	ἐκκλησία, ας church, congregation; assembly, gathering (of religious, political, or unofficial groups)

<sup>34</sup> Pres. John A. Moldstad, Jr., quoted in Ferkenstad, *Proclaim His Wonders*, 277.

κατισχύουσιν	3rd person plural future active indic- ative	κατισχύω have strength; over- come, overpower (Matt. 16:18); win, prevail (Luke 23:23)
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### *I Will Build My Church*

Technically, a “church” or ἐκκλησία is a gathering of people. It can refer to a general gathering together of citizens in an assembly, as in Acts 19:32. In Hebrews 2 it refers to the assembled congregation of the people of Israel. The word is used in reference to a local gathering of Christians and in reference to the total number of Christians living in a place (Romans 16:5 versus Acts 8:1). The word is also used to refer to the universal body of believers in Christ.<sup>35</sup> It is this last usage that the Savior employs in Matthew 16:18. The Church He speaks of is *the* Church, as in the Holy Christian Church.

There is only one Church. Sometimes it is difficult to recognize that there is only one Church because of the great many divisions that exist within visible Christianity, but the apostle Paul points out the oneness of the church repeatedly. In Ephesians 4:4, Paul writes, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.” In Galatians 3:28, he states that all believers are “one in Christ Jesus.” Paul likens the church to a body in Romans 12:4–5 when he says, “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”

The words modifying ἐκκλησία are important in that they limit the definition of church to being the church that is “mine,” that is, Christ’s. This is no small fact. Christ paid a high price to claim the Church as His own:

Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.<sup>36</sup>

In 1 Peter 2:9, the apostle points out that we are “His own special people,” chosen to “proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of

<sup>35</sup> Friberg and Friberg, *Analytical*, Entry 8531.

<sup>36</sup> Eph. 5:25–27.

darkness into His marvelous light.” The Church belongs to no one else but Christ alone.

Christ’s ownership of the church informs our understanding of and application of church governance and authority in the church. When a congregation respects that authority in the church belongs to Christ first and foremost—and not pastors, voters, or certain individual power brokers—it greatly simplifies matters. If Christ has all the authority in the church, then there is no room for manipulation, ultimatums, or any kind of sinful attitude that would seek to usurp Christ’s authority for the sake of selfishly getting one’s own way.

In addition to His sole ownership of the Church, Christ is also the sole builder of the Church. “I will build my church,” Jesus says. It is quite a feat for Christ to accomplish this, especially when one looks at the building materials. We were sinners headed for the fiery furnace of hell before Christ grabbed us bricks out of the fire and assembled us into His body, the Church. Christ’s responsibility for building the church takes the burden off His people for success in ministry. One may plant the seed of God’s Word, another may water that seed, but God gives the increase.<sup>37</sup>

These thoughts are summed up in the first thesis of “Doctrine of the Church”:

Our Lord has created one church. Jesus refers to it as “my church.” In speaking to Peter, He said, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). All true believers in Christ belong to this one church (Ephesians 2:19–22). We give expression to our faith in this church in the Apostles’ Creed: “I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.”<sup>38</sup>

Jesus Christ builds His Church out of all those who believe in Him. There is one Holy Christian Church built up from all believers in Christ. The Church is His; He builds it, and it belongs to Him.

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<sup>37</sup> 1 Cor. 3:6.

<sup>38</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, “Doctrine of the Church,” Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1980, Thesis 1, accessed March 16, 2018, <http://els.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/the-doctrine-of-the-church/>.

### *Upon This Rock*

When Jesus said, “Upon this rock I will build My church,” He did not refer to Peter. Nor was Jesus declaring that Peter would be the first pope. Πέτρος and πέτρα are two different words for “rock.” Πέτρος is a proper name, but essentially the meaning of the name is “stone,” as in “a stone,” the kind of rock that one could pick up and throw. Πέτρα, on the other hand, is “bedrock.”<sup>39</sup> In Jesus’ parable of the wise and foolish builders in Matthew 7, the wise builder built his house on the πέτρα while the foolish builder built his house on sand.

Jesus declared that He would build His Church on “this rock.” The bedrock foundation to which Jesus refers is Peter’s confession about Jesus in verse sixteen: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”<sup>40</sup> The foundation on which Christ builds His Church is the good news of who Jesus is and what He came to do! “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”<sup>41</sup> Paul told the Christians in Ephesus that they were no longer strangers, “but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.”<sup>42</sup>

So, where one finds the bedrock of Christ’s Word, regulated and ruled by the Chief Cornerstone Himself, one will also find the Church as well. The visible church exists wherever believers gather together around the means of grace. People who seek out other Christians will find them where God’s Word is proclaimed in its truth and purity and the Sacraments are rightly administered.

Therefore, we confess that God’s will is “that Christians unite in order to preserve the means of grace pure and unadulterated, to use these means of grace for their own edification, to show that unity exists among them, and to join hands in bringing the good news of salvation to others.”<sup>43</sup> The question, however, then, is in what ways do Christians unite in such fellowship? Christians unite chiefly by gathering together into local congregations that meet regularly for mutual encouragement in the Word of God (Hebrews 10:25; Acts 20:7).

<sup>39</sup> Friberg and Friberg, *Analytical*, Entries 21804, 21794.

<sup>40</sup> Matt. 16:16.

<sup>41</sup> 1 Cor. 3:11.

<sup>42</sup> Eph. 2:19-20.

<sup>43</sup> ELS Catechism Review Committee, *An Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism* (Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2001), 139, Question 205.

Christians also unite in other ways, though. In 2 Corinthians 8–9, St. Paul instructs the church in Corinth to prepare for their part in an offering being gathered by all the churches in Achaia (Greece) and Macedonia for the suffering mother church in Jerusalem. Already by this time, the church was organized beyond the local congregation and united as one body in Christ. While God’s will is for Christians to join in fellowship, He does not give an explicit command as to the external form this fellowship will take.

This [fellowship] normally is done through the external forms of the local congregation, synod and denomination. Although it is God’s will that Christians gather for public worship, these external forms, as such, however, are not divinely instituted. “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation” (Luke 17:20). Luther correctly says, “there is not a single letter in holy Scripture saying that such a church (i.e. a ‘physical, external Christendom’), where it is by itself, is instituted by God ... If they can show me that a single letter of Scripture speaks of it, I will recant my words.” (LW 39, 70)

The local congregation is the primary grouping because this is where Christians live and where they can readily and practically carry out the commands of God on a regular basis.<sup>44</sup>

Synod and denomination are manifestations of the church insofar as they are God’s people gathered around the means of grace with a shared confession of faith.

Christ uses the Gospel in Word and in Sacrament to build His Church. The truth of His Word is the foundation on which we are built together, with Christ Himself as the chief cornerstone and capstone. Therefore, wherever we find God’s Word proclaimed and the sacraments rightly administered, there the Church is found also.

### *The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail Against Her*

So, how do believers properly apply the doctrine of the Church? They proclaim God’s Word faithfully in truth and purity (Jeremiah 23:28). They gather around those means of grace for worship and mutual encouragement (Hebrews 10:24–25). They exercise the Office of the Keys, forgiving the sins of the penitent and retaining the sins of the impenitent (John 20:22–23; Matthew 16:19). They engage in evangelism and mission-work, keeping Jesus’ Great Commission to make disciples of all nations by baptizing them and teaching them everything

<sup>44</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, “Doctrine of the Church,” Thesis 4.



that He had commanded them (Matthew 28:19–20). They fellowship together, bearing with one another in love and strive to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1–3). They “test the spirits” of this age against the truth of God’s Word (1 John 4:1), marking false teachers and avoiding them (Romans 16:17).

Recognizing some of the conflicts that could arise between local church and synod or denomination, “Doctrine of the Church” proclaims:

Christians will be governed by the law of love and will want to do things decently and in order. In external matters we uphold the autonomy of the local congregation; also the advisory capacity of synod to the congregations, as asserted in our synod constitution. (Ch. 5, Par. 4) This is the practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.<sup>45</sup>

While the congregation has autonomy in most decisions, the synod reserves for itself the role of doctrinal oversight. For example, a professor at Concordia, Seward, Nebraska recently wrote an article espousing a form of the “day-age” theory of creation. In such a case, the doctrine of the Church ought to be applied in the correction of this false teaching. The university or college in question has the first right of discipline with their professor, but what happens when no one disciplines the professor? Whose role is it, then, to lead the professor to repent? If the synod is not church, then how can the synod possess and execute doctrinal oversight?

The church, at least the visible church, is often full of failure: failure to grow, failure to discipline false teachers, failure to function, failure to bear with one another in love, and failure to proclaim the truth. In the face of the visible church’s failures, one wonders how the Church will ever prevail? This is where Jesus’ promise applies regarding His Church. When Jesus says that “the gates of hell” shall not prevail against His Church, He’s using a synecdoche. Christ obviously means more than just “the gates of hell;” He means hell itself, along with its leader Satan and his minions, the devils. No matter how bad things look in the eyes of this world, in the end *nothing* will prevail against the Church—or its bedrock foundation.

We apply the doctrine of the Church by faithfully making use of the means of grace for ourselves and applying the means of grace in our congregation, allowing ourselves to be built on the bedrock foundation of Christ himself, and avoiding the sinking sands of false teachings that would undermine our faith in Christ. Members of the body of Christ

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., Thesis 7.

can apply the doctrine of the Church with confidence that, no matter how things might appear, if the Church has Christ and His saving work as its foundation, it will not fail.

### III. Roles of Men and Women in the Church

“Second-wave” feminism traces its origins in America to the late 1960s and early 1970s. As more women entered the workplace, as the nation began to engage in dialogue about equal rights and equal treatment for women in society, and as mainline Christian denominations began admitting women to their seminaries and ordaining them as pastors, the ELS also dealt with the question of the role of women in the church. “What, specifically, is that role? May they or may they not be ordained to the pastoral ministry? At the same time, the role of men in the church as Scripture presents it also needs to be set forth.”<sup>46</sup>

As more questions arose in the 1980s about how men and women both best serve their Lord according to Scripture, the Synod chose to publish a doctrinal statement in 1990 entitled, “The Roles of Men and Women in the Church.” While other church bodies have tried to address the roles of men and women in society at large, the ELS has chosen to limit its statement to Scripture’s clear passages concerning the roles of men and women in the family, and by extension, the Church.

A passage that provides a good springboard for discussion on this topic is Ephesians 5:21–27.

#### *Ephesians 5:21–27*

Ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ, <sup>22</sup> αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἰδίοις ἀνδράσιν ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ, <sup>23</sup> ὅτι ἀνὴρ ἐστὶν κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς ὡς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας, αὐτὸς σωτὴρ τοῦ σώματος· <sup>24</sup> ἀλλ’ ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ, οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί.

<sup>25</sup> Οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπάτε τὰς γυναῖκας, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἠγάπησεν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς, <sup>26</sup> ἵνα αὐτὴν ἀγιάσῃ καθαρῶς τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι, <sup>27</sup> ἵνα παραστήσῃ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἕνδοξον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, μὴ ἔχουσαν σπῖλον ἢ ρυτίδα ἢ τι τῶν τοιούτων, ἀλλ’ ἵνα ᾖ ἁγία καὶ ἄμωμος.

#### *Translation*

*Submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of Christ, <sup>22</sup> the wives to their own husbands as to the Lord, <sup>23</sup> for a husband is head of the wife*

<sup>46</sup> Larson and Madson, *Built*, 150.

as Christ is the head of the church, Himself Savior of the body;<sup>24</sup> but as the church submits to Christ, so also wives to their husbands in everything.

<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, <sup>26</sup> that He may sanctify her, cleansing [her] by means of the washing of water in connection with the Word, <sup>27</sup> that He may present to Himself a glorious church, not having stain or wrinkle or any other such thing, but that she would be holy and without blemish.

### Text notes

ὑποτασσόμενοι	present participle nominative plural	passive masculine	ὑποτάσσω put in subjection ...; pass. be subject, submit to, obey, be under the authority of; take a subordinate place (1 Cor. 14:34)
ἄλλήλοις	reciprocal dative plural	pronoun masculine	ἄλλήλων reciprocal pro. one another, each other; ἐν ἄ. mutual (Rom. 1:12)
φόβῳ	noun dative singular	masculine	φόβος, ου fear, terror; fear, reverence (for God); respect (for persons)
κεφαλῇ	noun feminine singular	nominative singular	κεφαλή, ἡς head (κατὰ κ. ἔχω have one's head covered 1 Cor. 11:4); lord, head (of superior rank, etc.); κ. γωνίας main corner-stone

### Submitting to One Another

A discussion of the roles of men and women appropriately begins with discussing the places where men and women are the same. Verse twenty-one sets the tone with a verb that dominates everything after it.<sup>47</sup> ὑποτασσόμενοι applies to all believers in the way they deal with each other. In the passive voice, it means to “subject oneself, be subjected or subordinated.”<sup>48</sup> The implication in Ephesians 5:21 is that people voluntarily yield their self-autonomy or authority to others out of love. In reality, both men and women subordinate themselves to one another—within the bounds of their respective roles, as they are outlined in the verses that follow.

<sup>47</sup> Habeck, *Ephesians*, 112.

<sup>48</sup> Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1st ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press and The Syndics of The Cambridge University Press, 1957), 855.

Society preaches a message that is the opposite of “subject yourselves to one another.” Instead, the world teaches people the art of self-preservation and “looking out for number one.” Do not subject or submit yourself to anyone; on the contrary, you want as much authority as you can handle. Especially in this postmodern age, relationships between people are viewed in terms of who has power over the other.

Yet this special submission Paul speaks about has a special motive. This submission takes place ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ. Christ is “Savior of the body” (v. 23) who “loved the church, and gave himself for it” (v. 25). “As we respect him for what he did for us, he leads us to follow his example and selflessly do whatever is spiritually profitable for our fellow believers.”<sup>49</sup> Remembering the motive for submission is important because the people to whom believers submit themselves will be sinful human beings just as they are. People disappoint. They misuse their authority—or exercise it poorly. They behave in ways that are just not that lovable. Yet Christians, according to their new man, submit themselves to one another—if not out of respect for the other person, then out of reverence and respect for Christ.

This mutual submission also opens the door to talk about the inherent equality of men and women before God. As God created man in His own image and likeness, in perfect holiness, “male and female He created them.”<sup>50</sup>

God created man and woman in his own image, that is, he created them with a true knowledge of Him and with perfect righteousness and holiness. Even though our first parents lost this image in the fall into sin, yet God in his grace promised the Savior and in Him restored this image.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to possessing an equal status in terms of creation, men and women also share an equal status in terms of their redemption and sanctification in the body of Christ. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>52</sup> Both men and women are equally forgiven of all their sins and stand before God in equal righteousness by faith

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<sup>49</sup> Habeck, *Ephesians*, 112.

<sup>50</sup> Gen. 1:27.

<sup>51</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, “Roles of Men and Women in the Church,” Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1990, Thesis 1, accessed March 16, 2018, <http://els.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/roles-of-men-and-women-in-the-church/>.

<sup>52</sup> Gal 3:28.

in the saving work of Jesus Christ. “This spiritual equality of man and woman is a blessed reality.”<sup>53</sup>

Through faith in Christ all Christians are members of the universal priesthood of believers and as such are in full possession of all its rights and privileges and are exhorted to exercise them.<sup>54</sup>

Submission is not a one-way street. Men and women are equal in terms of being created in the image of God and in terms of their redemptive status in God’s kingdom. So, men and women—husbands and wives—are called to equally submit to one another in fear of Christ, as part of their worship of God. Because of their differing roles, however, submission takes a different form in men than it does in women.

### *The Husband Is the Head of the Wife*

Scripture defines the roles of men and women, especially the roles of husbands and wives in this case, in this way: ἀνὴρ ἔστιν κεφαλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς ὡς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας.<sup>55</sup> The word κεφαλὴ means “head,” as in the thing that sits on your neck and holds your brains. Yet it also possesses the same meaning as the word “head” in the context of a leader, who is “the head”—of the household, the office, the company, and so on. This is the sense in which man is “head” of the woman—and in which Christ is head of the church.

This distinction has existed since the days of creation, when the Lord created Eve as a helper for Adam.<sup>56</sup> This order persisted even after Adam and Eve disobeyed God. To the woman God said, “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”<sup>57</sup> “The original structure at creation remained in effect after the fall into sin.”<sup>58</sup>

The man was created first. The woman was created to complement him, to be his helpmate. He was to be dominant, she to be subordinate. This was their relationship from then on.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, “Roles of Men and Women in the Church,” Thesis 2.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., Thesis 3.

<sup>55</sup> Eph. 5:23.

<sup>56</sup> Gen. 2.

<sup>57</sup> Gen. 3:16.

<sup>58</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, “Roles of Men and Women in the Church,” Thesis 5.

<sup>59</sup> Habeck, *Ephesians*, 113.

The chief analogy of this principle is the relationship between Christ and the church.

While Christ, the head, receives worship, honor, love and obedience from his body, the church, he gives the church infinitely more than the church has ever given him. He saved the church from sin and damnation by dying on the accursed tree of the cross. . . . Believers, who make up the church, are happy and grateful to have Christ as their head.<sup>60</sup>

This headship principle exists not only in the relationship of husband and wife, but also in the church. St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:3 wants us to know “that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” “The headship of man in his role of leadership to which the woman is subordinate is therefore God’s arrangement for good order.”<sup>61</sup>

This same kind of self-subordination exists surprisingly even in the relationship between the Father and the Son. In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, he writes, “Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.”<sup>62</sup> “Will be subject” in 1 Corinthians 15:28 is ὑποταγῆ, the aorist subjunctive form of the same verb applied to women in Ephesians 5:22–27. This example presents a profound mystery to us. On the one hand, we know the persons of the Trinity are equally God. Yet, the Son, even in His ascended glory, arranges Himself under the authority of the Father—who in turn, places all things under Christ’s authority!

In I Corinthians 15:28 the purpose of the Son’s submitting to the Father is not to put the Son in an inferior position, but to bring about a beautiful plan. The purpose of the wife’s submitting to her husband and of the woman’s being submissive within the Christian congregation is also to carry out a beautiful plan, viz., the establishment of a marriage that not only lasts but is also a wonderful harmony, and the establishment of an orderly and harmonious fellowship within the congregation.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, “Roles of Men and Women in the Church,” Thesis 7.

<sup>62</sup> 1 Cor. 15:28.

<sup>63</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, “Roles of Men and Women in the Church,” Thesis 8.

The headship principle is not about giving men all the power and women none of the power. Men are given the role of head; women the role of helper. Each role comes with its own rights and corresponding responsibilities. “The scriptural concept of subordination, rather than implying a superiority/inferiority structure, presents this headship structure as an ordering process.”<sup>64</sup>

*Wives Submit ... As to the Lord ... Husbands, Love ... as Christ Loved the Church*

Whether head or helper, both roles require humility and self-sacrifice. Husbands exercise their headship in relation to their wives with a self-sacrificing love. “Husbands, love (ἀγαπάτε) your wives, even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself (ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν) for her.” On the flip-side, wives show self-sacrificing love by subordinating themselves under the headship of their husbands, “as to the Lord.”

This is another aspect of life, however, that has been touched by sin. Both husbands and wives must deal with selfish desires that often want to do the opposite of engaging in loving self-sacrifice and submission. Husbands, instead of using their headship as an opportunity to show their love for their wives, can engage in selfish behavior that abuses their authority. Wives, instead of subordinating themselves under their husbands, can try to usurp their husbands’ authority or refuse to show respect for their husbands’ decisions. Husbands and wives often point fingers at one another as the reason they cannot show the kind of love that God commands. “He doesn’t take care of anything!” “She never listens!”

This is where God’s Word from Ephesians 5:21–27 especially shines because it points both husband and wife back to Christ and His forgiving love. The husband can be reminded that Christ did not wait for His bride to get her act together before He died for her. He gave Himself in love for an unlovable bunch of sinners. Therefore, the husband also needs to love his wife when she’s acting in an unlovable manner. At the same time, the wife can be reminded that her submission to her husband is not just done for her husband’s sake, but as an act of obedience and submission to Christ. And when all is said and done, both husband and wife turn to Christ in repentance in the sure hope of

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<sup>64</sup> Gaylin Schmeling, “Men and Women in the Church,” in *Bread of Life From Heaven* (Mankato: Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary Press, 2009), 300.

receiving His cleansing gospel proclamation, that His blood has purified them from all sin.<sup>65</sup>

As Paul connects the relationship between husband and wife to that of Christ and the church, then it is also appropriate to note that this headship principle also carries over into the church by God's command.<sup>66</sup> "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence."<sup>67</sup> Women are not to exercise authority over men in the church.

9. Our Lord has revealed that He wants the headship principle to be upheld in the church. It is for this reason that the Lord has restricted the pastoral office to men. (cf. I Timothy 2:11–14 and I Corinthians 14:34ff)

10. The same principle applies to woman suffrage in the church. Scripture forbids the women "to have authority over a man." (I Timothy 2:12)<sup>68</sup>

Women can certainly serve in the church and have done so since the church's beginning. Matthew tells us of the women who served Jesus who were also present at His crucifixion.<sup>69</sup> Luke makes mention of several women who provided for Jesus' ministry "out of their substance": Mary Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Chuza (Herod's steward), Susanna, among many others.<sup>70</sup> Lydia, the dealer in fine purple cloth, opened her home to Paul and the other believers in Philippi.<sup>71</sup> Aquila and his wife Priscilla both instructed Apollos together.<sup>72</sup> At the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul instructs his readers to greet Aquila and Priscilla on his behalf, along with Phoebe and Mary, whom Paul describes as having "labored much for us."<sup>73</sup> Countless other examples exist in Scripture of women who served the Lord faithfully, and yet within their God-given roles.

<sup>65</sup> 1 John 1:7.

<sup>66</sup> Schmeling, "Men and Women in the Church," 297.

<sup>67</sup> 1 Tim. 2:11–12.

<sup>68</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, "Roles of Men and Women in the Church," Theses 9, 10.

<sup>69</sup> Matt. 27:55–56.

<sup>70</sup> Luke 8:1–3.

<sup>71</sup> Acts 16:14, 40.

<sup>72</sup> Acts 18:36.

<sup>73</sup> Rom. 16:1–6.



Women may, for example, lend their counsel in open congregational forums; teach parochial school, Sunday school, vacation Bible school; direct choirs; serve on committees in advisory capacities; assist the pastor and elders in calling on the sick, shut-ins and singles; and also assist in works of charity in the congregation and community.<sup>74</sup>

Some point to Deborah's judgeship as an example of female authority. And a fine example she is—of the exception that proves the rule. The Israelite men in her day refused to exercise their God-given authority. Deborah passed Yahweh's command on to Barak to go up and fight the Canaanite king Jabin and Sisera his general, but Barak did not want to go unless Deborah was willing to go with him. As a result, Barak did not receive any of the glory of the victory. The Lord delivered Sisera into the hands of a woman.<sup>75</sup> Had there been a faithful man in Israel, there would have been no need for woman to serve as judge.

Deborah's interaction with Barak reinforces the point that while men have the right of authority at home and in church, they also possess all the responsibilities that go along with it. Our Lord also advises how those responsibilities ought to be carried out:

Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant ... just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.<sup>76</sup>

Men have the final say in decisions in the church, but those decisions need to be made having considered the needs and feelings of all, including the women. At the same time, women have the responsibility of encouraging men to fulfill their God-given obligations. "When men and women labor together in the Gospel, taking heed to the Word and working within the scriptural limits, then truly God is glorified and the church is edified."<sup>77</sup>

Believers apply the roles of men and women in the church correctly when both men and women willingly submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, as part of our worship. Women submit by willingly

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<sup>74</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, "Roles of Men and Women in the Church," Thesis 12.

<sup>75</sup> Judg. 4:4–10.

<sup>76</sup> Matt. 20:26, 28.

<sup>77</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, "Roles of Men and Women in the Church," Thesis 16.

placing themselves under the authority of men in the church and serve in capacities that do not usurp that authority for themselves. Men submit by not lording their authority over women, but exercise authority in the church by taking the needs of everyone—including women—into account.

#### IV. The Lord's Supper

Some controversies arise from external strife, such as the controversy over church fellowship that began in the 1930s. Other controversies begin from internal discussions and debates, such as the debate over the roles of men and women in the church. One of these internal discussions in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod centered around various questions regarding the Lord's Supper.

The synod always believed, taught, and confessed what Scripture says in Christ's Words of Institution: that the bread is the true body of Christ and the wine is the true blood of Christ, given and shed for the remission of sins. However, faith in the truth does not mean that believers never have questions about the Sacrament of the Altar and its proper practice. "For example, what effects the real presence so that the bread and wine truly are the body and blood of Christ? When during the celebration of the sacrament do they become that? How does the real presence continue? What is one to do with the uneaten and undrunk wine (the *reliquiae*) after the last communicant at the altar has been served?"<sup>78</sup>

In 1981 the ELS adopted a statement which the synod's Doctrine Committee drafted to address these various questions entitled, "The Lord's Supper." The statement consists of nine theses outlining Scripture's essential teachings concerning the Supper. What makes the statement unique, however, is in highlighting what Scripture does not say and leaves the answers to certain questions open. The synod adopted an addendum to the statement in 1989, six points to help further explain the last thesis. The final version of the statement as we have it today was adopted in 1997, with two more points relating to the moment of the presence and the consumption of the *reliquiae* (the remaining elements) of the Supper. However, the chief nuggets of what one needs to know about this controversy can be gleaned from 1 Corinthians 11:23–25, Paul's restatement of the Words of Institution.

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<sup>78</sup> Larson and Madson, *Built*, 153.

### 1 Corinthians 11:23–25

Ἐγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, ὃ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν, ὅτι ὁ κύριος Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ἣ παρεδίδετο ἔλαβεν ἄρτον <sup>24</sup> καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ εἶπεν· τοῦτό μου ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. <sup>25</sup> ὡσαύτως καὶ τὸ ποτήριον μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι λέγων· τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, ὅσάκις ἐὰν πίνητε, εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν.

#### Translation

*For I myself received from the Lord what I also handed over to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night in which He was betrayed took bread<sup>24</sup> and when He gave thanks He broke [it] and said: "This is my body which is for you; do this in My remembrance."<sup>25</sup> In the same way also the cup after the supper saying: "This cup is the new testament in my blood; do this, whenever you drink [it], in My remembrance."*

#### Text notes

παρέλαβον	aorist active indicative, 1st person singular	παραλαμβάνω (aor. παρέλαβον) receive
παρέδωκα	aorist active indicative, 1st person singular	παραδίδωμι (aor. παρέδωκα) hand or give over... deliver, entrust, commit, give; hand down, pass on; commend
παρεδίδετο	imperfect passive indicative 3rd person singular	παραδίδωμι hand or give over, deliver up (pass. often be arrested); betray, deliver (to death)
ἄρτον	masculine singular accusative	ἄρτος, οὐ bread
ἔκλασεν	aorist active indicative 3rd person singular	κλάω break (only of bread in the NT ...)
σῶμα	neuter singular nominative	σῶμα, τος body
ἀνάμνησιν	feminine singular accusative	ἀνάμνησις, εως f reminder, remembrance (εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀ. in memory of me)

ποτήριον	neuter accusative	singular	ποτήριον, ου cup, drinking vessel.
διαθήκη	feminine nominative	singular	διαθήκη, ης covenant ... will, testament (Gal. 3:15); both covenant and will (He 9:16, 17; Gal. 3:17).
αἷματι	neuter dative	singular	αἷμα, τος blood.

*Take Eat; This Is My Body ... This Cup Is the New Testament in My Blood*

When Paul established churches, as he did in Corinth, he also established among them the celebration of the Lord's Supper. When he did so, Paul handed down what he himself had received "from the Lord" (ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου). The risen and ascended Christ had given Paul a special revelation of the gospel in preparation for his apostolic work;<sup>79</sup> a portion of that revelation must have included the Words of Institution (*verba*).

For the purpose of determining exactly what Jesus said when He instituted the Eucharist, one must return to the parallel accounts of the institution itself. When it comes to what Jesus says concerning the bread, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul write thus: "This is My body" (τοῦτό μου ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα).<sup>80</sup> The μου occupies a different place in Matthew, but it is still there. The second half of Christ's institution presents a small, but surmountable, challenge because in the case of what happens with the cup, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul do not write *exactly* the same thing. Matthew and Mark say, "This is my blood of the covenant/testament" (τοῦτο ἐστὶν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης), while Luke and Paul say, "This cup is the new covenant/testament in my blood" (τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἷματι).<sup>81</sup>

This is a case of an *apparent* contradiction, not an actual one. The challenge is surmountable because we understand Paul's and Luke's version in light of the accounts of Matthew and Mark. In all four instances, Jesus is referring to the cup as His blood, by which the new

<sup>79</sup> Gal. 1:11–12.

<sup>80</sup> 1 Cor. 11:24; Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; and Luke 22:19.

<sup>81</sup> Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; 1 Cor. 11:25; and Luke 22:20. This could be an opportunity for some source criticism here. Which came first, Paul's version or Luke's? Luke and Paul were known to associate with one another. I would venture to say Paul, especially since he adamantly defends his version as "from the Lord."

covenant/testament is sealed (more on covenant theology later). We also understand this based on what Paul says elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 11.

The most important item to note is the verb that Christ uses regarding the relationship of the bread to His body and the cup (the wine<sup>82</sup>) to His blood. The bread ἐστὶν Christ's body and the cup ἐστὶν Christ's blood. The Reformed teach that Jesus is only speaking metaphorically here, that when He says, "This is My body," He only means, "This is like My body" or "This represents My body." Paul's understanding of ἐστὶν is revealed in verse 27 of 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul points out that anyone who eats the bread (ἄρτον) and drinks the cup (ποτήριον) unworthily "is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (ἐνοχος ἔσται τοῦ σώματος καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ κυρίου). This is more than a metaphor; this is a sacrament.

At the same time, however, Scripture calls us to avoid going too far in the opposite direction. The bread and wine do not cease to exist so that only the *accidens* of bread and wine remain. That same verse (1 Cor. 11:27) still speaks of eating bread and drinking the cup. Transubstantiation is not a thing.

We hold that "in the Holy Supper the two essences, the natural bread and the true body of Christ, are present together here on earth in the ordered action of the sacrament, though the union of the body and blood of Christ with the bread and wine is not a personal union, like that of the two natures in Christ, but a sacramental union ..." (FC, SD VII, 37–38, p. 575f).<sup>83</sup>

Scripture declares that the Sacrament of the Altar is Christ's true body and blood in, with, and under the bread and the wine, given to us Christians to eat and to drink.

### *The New Testament in My Blood*

According to the Words of Institution as they are found in 1 Corinthians 11, Christ says that the cup "is the new testament in My blood" (ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι). Only a handful of words in Scripture carry as much meaning and baggage as διαθήκη. In English it can be translated as "covenant" or "testament," encompassing the

<sup>82</sup> Matt. 26:29. Jesus, in reference to the cup, calls what is in it "the fruit of the vine," which is an obvious reference to wine made from grapes.

<sup>83</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, "The Lord's Supper," Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1997, accessed March 16, 2018, Thesis 2, <http://els.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/the-lords-supper/>.

shades of meaning that are implied in both those words. With reference to “covenant,” it ties Jesus’ institution of the sacrament to the institution of the Mosaic covenant that Yahweh established with the children of Israel at Mt. Sinai, a covenant that was sealed with blood.<sup>84</sup> It is only fitting that the new covenant is also sealed with blood: the blood of Christ. Instead of sprinkling it on our heads, our Savior invites us to drink His blood in and with the wine.

The new covenant is different than the old covenant. The old covenant called the people to faithful obedience as a condition of God’s favor. According to Jeremiah, Yahweh declares that under the new covenant He “will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more” (:כִּי אֶסְלַח לְעוֹנֵיהֶם וְלִחַטָּאתָם לֹא אֶזְכֹּר-עוֹד).<sup>85</sup> In other words, the new covenant is the covenant of “forgive and forget.” A covenant that is possible because the blood that seals the covenant with us also testifies to us what Christ says about His blood of the covenant/testament in Matthew 26:28: “which is poured out for many for the remission of sins” (τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυννόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν).

Along with Christ’s body and blood under the bread and the wine, Christ’s disciples receive the forgiveness of sins won by Christ pouring out His blood on the cross. And in connection with that forgiveness, worthy recipients also receive the strengthening of their faith in Christ.

### *Do This ... In Remembrance of Me*

The blessings of the Sacrament are so spectacular that no one who believes in them wants to miss receiving them. Yet how does a communicant know when she has attended a proper celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar? Well, an easy way to frame the answer is to determine what is included when Jesus says, “Do this in remembrance of Me.” What are the antecedents of “this”? “[H]e took bread ... broke it and said, ‘This is My body ... Do this in remembrance of Me.’”<sup>86</sup> “In the same way also he took the cup ... saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’”<sup>87</sup> Take the bread ... take the cup ... speak the words ... eat and drink ... “Do this in remembrance of Me.”

<sup>84</sup> Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *LXX Septuaginta*, 9th ed. (Stuttgart: Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt/Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1971), Exod. 24:8.

<sup>85</sup> K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia BHS*, 4th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990), Jer. 31:34.

<sup>86</sup> 1 Cor. 11:23–24, ESV.

<sup>87</sup> 1 Cor. 11:25, ESV.

“This” includes it all. A proper celebration of the Lord’s Supper requires bread, wine, the Words of Institution, and people to receive it. The bread and wine become a sacrament—become a participation in the body and blood of Christ—only when the Word of Christ is spoken, that is, when we bless “the cup of blessing”, as Paul says.<sup>88</sup> All that matters is that the words are spoken. The minister can be a blatant hypocrite who does not believe the words he is saying and the sacrament would still be valid. When the words are spoken, one can be confident that the bread and wine are Christ’s body and blood.

At the same time, it must be noted that in the sacrament the bread is broken, the cup is drunk. If the bread and wine are consecrated, but instead of being distributed to communicants, someone decides to keep the consecrated elements in a jar, so he can “have Jesus with him all the time,” that is not a proper celebration of the Lord’s Supper because there are no communicants.

The heart of the controversy was a twofold dispute. First, there was a debate over the “moment of the presence,” the exact moment when the bread and wine also are Christ’s true body and blood. This is something that needs to be answered with care. Many hold to what may be termed a “soft receptionism,” trusting Christ’s word that the bread is His body, but believing that it is His body only when they receive it. Yet the true power in a sacrament is never in our work, but in the Word of God. What usually happens, however, when someone tries to correct a false understanding, is that they wind up overcorrecting. In the case of answering this soft receptionism, some went too far in claiming that there is a mathematical point in time when the Words of Institution effect the presence. But God’s Word does not give a precise, exact moment—other than the plain assurance that the Words of Institution offer.

While one may hold a private opinion as to when the real presence begins, yet we reject the dogmatic assertion that in a valid celebration of the Lord’s Supper it must be maintained that the body and blood are immediately present after the Words of Institution have been spoken by the pastor or the dogmatic assertion that it must be maintained that the body and blood are present only in the reception.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> 1 Cor. 10:16.

<sup>89</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, “The Lord’s Supper,” Thesis 9, g.

Secondly, there was a debate over the consumption of the remaining elements after the Lord's Supper (*reliquiae*). Does the presence of Christ's body and blood persist after the celebration of the Lord's Supper has been completed? On one hand, as has been pointed out earlier, recipients are needed to have a proper celebration of the Lord's Supper. No more recipients, no more Eucharist. At the same time, Scripture is silent about what happens after the Lord's Supper. Therefore, different churches have different traditions with regard to what to do with the remaining bread and wine. In some churches, the pastor consumes the leftover wine from the chalice, which otherwise would have been disposed of. Other congregations reverently dispose of the wine in the chalice by pouring it out on the ground, or, in the case of a church that uses both common and individual cups, if no one used the common cup, to reuse the wine on another sacramental occasion. Some congregations and pastors have strong opinions on the consumption of the *reliquiae*, yet one must distinguish between a pious opinion and doctrine.

We reject the dogmatic assertion that the remaining elements in a valid celebration of the Lord's Supper must be consumed; rather, we continue to uphold the practice of the church down through the years that the remaining elements may be consumed, or be disposed of in a reverent manner, or be saved for future sacramental use.<sup>90</sup>

When Christ says, "Do this in remembrance of Me," He is referring to the entire activity of the sacrament: consecrating bread and wine with the Words of Institution as He gave them, and then distributing them to the communicants so that they can eat and drink. However, recognizing that it is Christ's Words, the Words of Institution, which effects His presence in the sacrament, we let Scripture speak where it speaks and be silent where it is silent with regard to when the presence of His body and blood begins and ends in the Sacrament.

## V. The Public Ministry of the Word

Discussions about the Ministry, especially within the old Norwegian Synod (1853–1917), go as far back as the 1860s. The question at that time essentially concerned the nature of the office of the Public Ministry: is it instituted by God or is it man-made? In 1862, the Norwegian Synod adopted resolutions that, at least to their own

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., Thesis 9., h.



satisfaction, resolved the issue. They asserted the divine institution of the ministry.<sup>91</sup>

In more recent history, discussions concerning the ministry—along with the doctrine of the Church—took place among members of the Synodical Conference (LCMS, WELS, and ELS). There were persistent questions about the nature of the Public Ministry and its scope. Did the Public Ministry only include the parish pastor? Or were other positions in the church (like Christian school teachers) to be understood as being included in the office of the Public Ministry? Since the practice of all our church bodies at the time was the same (both pastors and teachers had divine calls from the congregation), and since there were greater issues to be discussed (such as church fellowship), the issue was not seen as being divisive of fellowship.<sup>92</sup>

After the ELS and WELS broke fellowship with the Missouri Synod, however, discussions about the doctrine of the ministry continued in our synod in connection with discussions concerning the doctrine of the Church. While the doctrine of the Church was settled in the early 1980s, the Public Ministry persisted in being a “hot topic” for debate, especially as evangelical Christianity and the “church growth” movement began to label every Christian as a “minister.” In 2002, the synod president established an ad-hoc committee tasked with producing a doctrinal statement on the doctrine of the Public Ministry. The statement on the Public Ministry of the Word was adopted, but not without controversy.<sup>93</sup>

### *Matthew 16:19*

δώσω σοι τὰς κλείδας τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν, καὶ ὃ ἕαν δήσης ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται δεδεμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, καὶ ὃ ἕαν λύσης ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

### *Translation*

*“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”*

<sup>91</sup> Larson and Madson, *Built*, 29.

<sup>92</sup> See footnote 33.

<sup>93</sup> Ferkenstad, *Proclaim His Wonders*, 277.

*Text notes*

κλείδας	feminine accusative	plural	κλείς , κλειδός, key
δήσης	aorist subjunctive	active 2nd person singular	δέω (aor. ἔδησα, subj. δήσω ...) bind, tie
δεδεμένον	perfect participle	passive nomina- tive neuter singular	δέω (pf. pass. δέδεμαι) bind, tie
λύσης	aorist subjunctive	active 2nd person singular	λύω loose, untie; release, set free; break, set aside; destroy, pull down; break up; allow
λελυμένον	perfect participle	passive nomina- tive neuter singular	λύω loose, untie; release, set free; break, set aside; destroy, pull down; break up; allow

*The Office of the Keys*

From the immediate context of the passage, it is evident that Christ is the one speaking. His audience is His disciples. He promises to give them the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” (τὰς κλείδας τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν), and that they will be able to use these keys to “bind” (δέω) and “loose” (λύω). Both of the conditional statements Jesus uses are classified as “future more vivid,” indicating the likelihood of their fulfillment. In this case, Jesus promises that whatever they “bind” on earth will be “bound” in heaven, and whatever they “loose” on earth will be “loosed” in heaven. The question is what is being bound and loosed?

Jesus uses the identical vocabulary in Matthew 18:18, in the context of teaching His disciples about how to deal with sin and when to forgive sins. We also find a parallel in John 20:23, when the risen Jesus appeared to His disciples in the upper room and said, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” These passages, taken together, describe the Office of the Keys—the binding key, that binds sins to the impenitent, and the loosing key, that releases the guilt of sin from the penitent sinner. Christians can forgive the sins of penitent sinners because, as Jesus promises, “He who hears you, hears me.”<sup>94</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Luke 10:16.

While it is true that Jesus is speaking to His disciples, Scripture indicates that the Office of the Keys has been given to the whole church. In Matthew 18 Jesus is not just describing church discipline, but also the steps that individual Christians take to address one who has sinned against them.<sup>95</sup> Those who pray the Lord's Prayer all ask the Father to forgive their debts, "as we forgive our debtors."<sup>96</sup> Peter states that Christians in general are chosen by God for the purpose of declaring His praises as part of the universal priesthood of all believers.<sup>97</sup>

The church uses the keys to preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments, and practice church discipline. The keys are used privately or unofficially when individual Christians, on behalf of Christ, speak the Gospel of forgiveness to others; when they forgive the sins of those who sin against them; when they retain the sins of those who do not repent, e.g., when they confront in a brotherly way those who need to repent of their sins; and when in "the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren" they comfort one another with the words of the Gospel.... Christians also use the keys publicly or officially when scripturally qualified individuals, who have been called by Christ through the church, forgive and retain sins on behalf of Christ and His church.... Christians also use the keys to judge the teaching of their pastors and teachers; they are to beware of false prophets....

1. We reject any teaching that denies individual Christians the use of the keys privately in their calling as the Universal Priesthood of All Believers.

2. We reject any teaching that treats the Universal Priesthood and the Public Ministry as one and the same thing.<sup>98</sup>

Statements 1 and 2 above help avoid two extremes regarding the Office of the Keys. On one hand, Scripture has given the Office of the Keys to the Church for Christians to use privately in their calling as members of the universal priesthood. Christians can forgive the sins of

<sup>95</sup> Matt. 18:15–18.

<sup>96</sup> Matt. 6:12.

<sup>97</sup> 1 Pet. 2:9.

<sup>98</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, "The Public Ministry of the Word," Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2005, I. Office of the Keys, accessed March 16, 2018, <http://els.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/the-public-ministry-of-the-word/>.

their neighbor who sins against them. On the other hand, while every Christian is a priest, but not every Christian is a minister.

Jesus granted the Office of the Keys to His Church for the purpose of forgiving and retaining sins privately in our dealings with other individuals and publicly through the Public Ministry of the Word. All Christians have authority to forgive and retain sins in their daily lives, but the public use of the keys is reserved for those whom Christ has called through the church to publicly proclaim the Gospel and administer the sacraments.

### *Ephesians 4:11–12*

Καὶ αὐτὸς ἔδωκεν τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους, τοὺς δὲ προφήτας, τοὺς δὲ εὐαγγελιστάς, τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους, <sup>12</sup> πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ,

### *Translation*

*And He Himself gave on the one hand the apostles, and on the other hand the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> toward the equipping of the saints into work of ministry, for edifying of the body of Christ.*

### *Text Notes*

ἔδωκεν	aorist active indicative 3rd person singular	δίδωμι (aor. ἔδωκα) give; grant, allow, permit; place, put; appoint; establish
μὲν ... δὲ,		μὲν ... δὲ, on the one hand ... on the other hand
ἀποστόλους	masculine plural accusative	ἀπόστολος, ου apostle; messenger
προφήτας	masculine plural accusative	προφήτης, ου prophet
εὐαγγελιστάς	masculine plural accusative	εὐαγγελιστής, οῦ one who preaches the good news, evangelist
ποιμένας	masculine plural accusative	ποιμήν, ἑνος shepherd; pastor
διδασκάλους	masculine plural accusative	διδάσκαλος, ου teacher, rabbi

καταρτισμόν	masculine accusative	singular	καταρτισμός, οὐ	equipping, training
διακονίας	feminine genitive	singular	διακονία, ας	ministry, service
οικοδομήν	feminine accusative	singular	οικοδομή, ἥς	upbuilding, strengthening, encouragement

*He Himself Gave Some to Be ...*

Nouns and verbs are always a good place to begin. In the case of Ephesians 4:11, we have an intensive pronoun, αὐτός, followed by a verb in the third person, ἔδωκεν, “He Himself gave.” So, who is “He”? A simple look at the context reveals the antecedent. Verse seven speaks of the grace given us according to the measure “of Christ’s gift” (τῆς δωρεᾶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ). Christ is still the subject by the time the reader comes to verses eleven and twelve. Paul’s main point in verse 11, taken in context with the rest of the chapter, is that prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are all just as much gifts of Christ to His church as apostles, hence they are part of the Public Ministry that Christ established. The Public Ministry, no matter what form it takes, is a gift of our Lord, not a man-made invention.

3. We reject any teaching that the Public Ministry is a development of the church and not a divine institution.

4. We reject any teaching that holds that the Public Ministry is established merely by the orderly carrying out of the Universal Priesthood according to 1 Corinthians 14:40.<sup>99</sup>

If something is not a divine institution, then it can be removed. If the Public Ministry is a development of the church, then somehow it can continue to “develop” to the point that perhaps, one day (as some have attempted to do in the past), the church may try to dispense with the Public Ministry. Fortunately, the Public Ministry is a gift given by Christ.

Christ gives people to serve in the Public Ministry by calling them to serve. Paul, along with the other apostles, was called by Christ.<sup>100</sup> While the apostles and many of the prophets received immediate calls, direct calls from God Himself, after Christ’s ascension He now calls

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., II. The Public Ministry of the Word.

<sup>100</sup> Rom. 1:1.

most people into the Public Ministry of the Word in a mediate way, through the church. The choosing of Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot is an early example of this.<sup>101</sup> The church may make the selection of who will serve, but the Lord is ultimately calling the individual.

12. We reject the teaching that every Christian is a public minister of the Word.

13. We reject any teaching that one may publicly teach, preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call (AC XIV)<sup>102</sup>

The Public Ministry of the Word is instituted by Christ for the benefit of His Church. While all Christians are members of the Priesthood of All Believers, Christ specifically calls individuals to publicly serve the church with the means of grace in His name.

### *Shepherds*

Based on the list of callings that Paul provides in Ephesians 4:11, one could say that the Public Ministry is multifaceted, necessitating us to speak of it in broad terms, encompassing several different kinds of offices. Paul's intent by use of the *μὲν ... δὲ*, construction indicates that people already understood the apostolic office as a gift of Christ. Under the Spirit's inspiration, Paul wanted his readers to realize that all of these offices—and the people who fill them—are given by the risen and ascended Jesus.

Yet a close inspection of Paul's list also leads us to examine how many of these offices still exist today. "Apostles" are no more. The same is true of "prophets."<sup>103</sup> There has not been an "evangelist" in the strict sense of the term (an author of the good news of Jesus) since Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (though some who are called into the ministry today have calls that are limited to evangelism, that is bearing witness to the gospel of Christ to those who have not heard it). The two offices left on the list, "pastors and teachers" (*τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους*) appear to be the only ones that still remain.

The way this pair of offices is listed provides some challenges for interpretation. Are these two separate offices or is *διδασκάλους* just

<sup>101</sup> Acts 1:15–26.

<sup>102</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, "The Public Ministry of the Word," IV.

<sup>103</sup> Though it must be said that there are some among the modern evangelicals who refer to a new apostolic movement with new apostles and prophets.

delineating another aspect of serving as ποιμένας? The fact that ποιμένας receives the definite article while διδασκάλους does not—does that mean anything?

Because there is no separate article before διδασκάλους, some suppose that one person performed both function, shepherding the flock and teaching it. Be that as it may. Since we today have pastors and teachers, we do not hesitate to look upon both as gifts from the ascended Lord.<sup>104</sup>

The wider use of the term “the Public Ministry” will be addressed shortly. First, however, is Paul’s use of the term ποιμένας and what is termed in “The Public Ministry of the Word” as the narrow use of the term in relation to the pastoral office. Ephesians 4:11 is the only place where this noun is used as a title of for the presiding office in the New Testament. As most pastors know, the word literally means “shepherd.” Yet it is an apt description of the work, especially when compared to Christ. Peter references Christ as the ultimate Shepherd or Pastor when he writes that we were like straying sheep, but now we have returned “to the Shepherd and Overseer” (τὸν ποιμένα καὶ ἐπίσκοπον) of our souls.<sup>105</sup> Note that Christ, in connection with being our Shepherd, is also our “Overseer” or “Bishop” (ἐπίσκοπον). Here is one place where Scripture makes the connection between “shepherding” and the work of oversight of souls.

As stated before, men are called by God to serve in this pastoral office mediately, through the congregation. While the Bible mentions examples of the laying on of hands, as in a rite of ordination (see Acts 8:18, 1 Timothy 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:6, and Hebrews 6:2), nowhere does the New Testament declare that pastors derive their authority from being ordained by a bishop via apostolic succession.

6. We reject any teaching that the apostolic authority of the Public Ministry of the Word or the validity of the sacraments depends on or is derived from ordination by a bishop standing in an unbroken chain of succession from the apostles, or the necessity of maintaining a “historic episcopate.”<sup>106</sup>

The qualifications of an *episcopos* are listed primarily in 1 Timothy 3:1–7:

<sup>104</sup> Habec, *Ephesians*, 84.

<sup>105</sup> 1 Pet. 2:25.

<sup>106</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, “The Public Ministry of the Word,” II. A.

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Primarily, pastors' work is to be "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."<sup>107</sup> They are to carry out Christ's great commission of Matthew 28, making disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching the full counsel of God. This work consists of preaching the word—convincing, rebuking, exhorting with patient teaching,<sup>108</sup> along with spiritual oversight of the flock of believers entrusted to them.<sup>109</sup> The work of a pastor is all-encompassing in terms of the public administration of the means of grace and the Office of the Keys. Therefore, it is indispensable.

5. We reject any teaching that denies the exercise of spiritual oversight by the pastoral office.<sup>110</sup>

While everyone who enters this pastoral office must be capable of a full use of the keys, in 1 Timothy 5, Paul distinguishes between different kinds of *πρεσβύτεροι* (a synonym for *ἐπίσκοπος*). They are all worthy of double honor, but especially those who "labor in the Word and teaching" (*οἱ κοπιῶντες ἐν λόγῳ καὶ διδασκαλίᾳ*). If there are those who especially labor in the Word, there must also be those who labor, perhaps, in other areas, while still possessing all of the skills and requirements for the full pastoral ministry. "Missionary, assistant pastor, professor of theology, synod president (who supervises doctrine in the church), and chaplain"—these are all modern examples of offices within the Public Ministry where the pastoral office is not limited to the parish pastor.<sup>111</sup> Therefore:

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<sup>107</sup> 1 Cor. 4:1.

<sup>108</sup> 2 Tim. 4:2.

<sup>109</sup> 1 Pet. 5:1–2.

<sup>110</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, "The Public Ministry of the Word," II. A.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*



7. We reject the teaching that the Public Ministry of the Word is limited to the ministry of a parish pastor.”<sup>112</sup>

Only men are called to serve in the pastoral ministry because the office exercises authority over the entire congregation, including the men (see 1 Timothy 2:11–12).

Scripture clearly teaches that women are not to be in the pastoral office, because this presiding office includes the exercise of authority over men... Therefore women shall not read the Scripture lessons in the divine service, preach the sermon, administer Baptism or distribute the Lord’s Supper, for these things are intimately related to the pastoral office.<sup>113</sup>

### *Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, and Teachers*

Now to the wider use of the term “Public Ministry.” While the pastoral office is the Public Ministry of the Word in the narrow sense of the term, we note that Scripture has given examples of other offices that, while not the presiding office, still publicly carried out the Office of the Keys to some extent, within the bounds of God’s commands for ministry. In connection with Ephesians 4:11, pastors teach, but at the same time, we recognize that some who teach in the congregation are not pastors.

Paul’s list of offices in Ephesians 4:11 is not exhaustive. In 1 Timothy 3:8–15, immediately following his list of qualifications for *episkopoi*, Paul delineates the qualities that men should possess who desire to be *diakonoi* (those who minister/serve), an office not listed in Ephesians 4. Interestingly, the qualities are virtually the same.

Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

He also speaks of “differences of ministries” (διαίρέσεις διακονιῶν) in 1 Corinthians 12:

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.... And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.<sup>114</sup>

Note that in addition to prophets and apostles, he includes teachers, those who work miracles and gifts of healing, along with helpers and administrators, and even those who have the ability to speak in foreign languages! Not all of these positions exist today (miracles, healings, and speaking in tongues), but we recognize that God put (ἔθετο) all of these people in service the church!

Some have tried to argue that Lutheran grade school teachers (or Sunday School teachers, for that matter) are only serving as proxies for the parents as they teach the gospel to children. However, it was the risen Jesus who told Peter to feed His lambs—His young sheep.<sup>115</sup> Training children is also the work of the church, work for which people can be called by God to serve.

Extending calls to teachers who have spiritual care of children in Christian schools is not merely a laudable custom, but is in accordance with Romans 10:14–17 and Augsburg Confession XIV, not only for the sake of good order, but also because these teachers carry out a specific part of the Public Ministry. It is by human right that the church separates a limited portion of the office to one individual. But it is by divine right that one exercises that work on behalf of the Christians through whom the call has come.

8. We reject the teaching that only those qualified to carry out a full use of the keys are in the Public Ministry.

9. We reject the teaching that the Public Ministry is limited to any one divinely fixed form, that is, limited to the pastoral office to the exclusion of other teachers of the Word.

10. We reject any teaching which would conclude that the means of grace are effective only when used by a pastor.

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<sup>114</sup> 1 Cor. 12:5, 28.

<sup>115</sup> John 21:15.

11. We reject any teaching that makes the office of the Lutheran elementary school teacher, Sunday school teacher or any other limited office in the church equivalent to the pastoral office.<sup>116</sup>

At the same time it must be said that not all forms of the Public Ministry are equal. Paul clearly prioritizes them in 1 Corinthians 12:28 with apostles, prophets, and teachers (i.e., pastors) at the top of the list.

The extent to which one is authorized by the call of the church to exercise the keys publicly is the extent to which one is in the Public Ministry of the Word. Authorization to exercise a limited part of the Public Ministry of the Word does not imply authorization to exercise all or other parts of it (1 Corinthians 12:5, 28, Romans 12:6–8, Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:8, 5:17).<sup>117</sup>

*Toward the Equipping of the Saints into Work of Ministry, for Edifying of the Body of Christ ...*

Why has the Lord provided so many and different forms of the Public Ministry? Paul provides an answer in Ephesians 4:12: “equipping the saints into work of ministry.” This equipping that goes on (καταρτισμός) is “a process of adjustment that results in a complete preparedness.”<sup>118</sup> In the medical field, it referred to the process of setting a bone.<sup>119</sup> Anyone who has fallen off a tree branch and experienced a broken wrist can attest to the pain of that process. The implication of the equipping is training and discipline of the faithful for “work of ministry/service” (ἔργον διακονίας).

Deacons were first appointed in Acts 6 to aid in the distribution of food, especially with regard to Christians of a Hellenic-Jewish background. Yet they did much more than that. Stephen and Philip are especially noted for their work as evangelists. Stephen even laid down his own life for the sake of Christ and the gospel. What greater work of service is there than to share the good news of Christ crucified and risen? What other service does more for “building up the body of Christ” (οικοδομῆν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ)? All of these offices exist, from the pastoral ministry down to various teachers and administrators and even Sunday School teachers, so that Christians can grow in their

<sup>116</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Synod, “The Public Ministry of the Word,” II. B.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Friberg and Friberg, *Analytical*, Entry 15322.

<sup>119</sup> Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English*, 419.

faith and make better use of the Office of the Keys in their private lives. Christ has given the Public Ministry so that His body the church is built up internally and externally, as more people hear about the saving work of Jesus.

The Public Ministry in its fullest form (and narrowest definition) is the presiding office or pastoral office as an indispensable office in the Church, for the purpose of preaching, teaching, administering the sacraments and oversight of the church. Because of the authority of the pastoral office, women do not serve as pastors. In a wider sense of the term, in Christian freedom the church may separate out some part of the work of ministry to a call with a narrow scope or purpose, as when calling a Christian school teacher. Yet school teachers (along with other called positions) are still in the Public Ministry of the Word, insofar as they are making use of the office of the keys as part of their calling (for example, teaching the Gospel to children). The purpose of the Public Ministry of the Word, in both wide and narrow senses of the term, is to prepare God's people for works of service and to build up the church.

## Conclusion

Doctrine divides. God's Word is "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."<sup>120</sup> Christ's coming did not bring peace but a sword that divides households, families, friendships, and communities.<sup>121</sup> The division is caused by the nature of the truth. As our church body has seen, the truth of God's Word has separated us from people with whom we at one time walked together in spiritual unity.

At the same time, however, doctrine also unites. As believers join together in agreement, of one mind when it comes to the truth. Time and again the apostles urge the church to be of the same mind; this happens when believers submit to the truth of God's Word.

Either way, whether it divides or unites, we know that the Word of God endures and will continue to endure long after we are gone.

Lord grant, while worlds endure,  
We keep its teachings pure  
Throughout all generations.  
Amen. LSQ

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<sup>120</sup> Heb. 4:12.

<sup>121</sup> Matt. 10:34–36.

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# Preaching the Old Testament, Even If You Follow the One-Year Series

Shawn D. Stafford  
Pastor, Hartland and Manchester Lutheran Churches  
Hartland and Manchester, Minnesota

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## I. Choosing the Text

LIKE MANY IN MY GENERATION, I GREW UP IN A church where an Old Testament lesson was not read regularly during the Divine Service.<sup>1</sup> This was commonplace within our fellowship at the time. In the early 1980s, WELS professor John Jeske lamented that although the Old Testament “represents about three-quarters of the Bible, the ratio of Old Testament sermons to New Testaments is perhaps 1:5.”<sup>2</sup>

What accounted for this lack of Old Testament preaching at that time? Ernst H. Wendland surmised that it was because “it simply takes more time and effort for the busy-busy pastor of today to work with an Old Testament series.”<sup>3</sup> Daniel Deutschlander captures such preachers’ attitudes toward preaching the Old Testament when he says:

What a pure delight it is to preach texts from the Gospels! What a challenge to mind and heart and soul to preach texts from the

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<sup>1</sup> Even after *Christian Worship* was adopted by the congregation, when I returned there to preach as a seminary student in the late '90s, the Old Testament lessons still were not used.

<sup>2</sup> John Jeske, “Preaching from the Old Testament” (paper presented at Metropolitan North Pastoral Conference, Newburg, WI, March 15, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Ernst H. Wendland, “The ILCW Series and the Old Testament,” Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Digital Library, accessed May 13, 2019, <http://essays.wls.wels.net/bitstream/handle/123456789/669/WendlandILCW.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.



epistles! But the Old Testament texts ... well, I suppose we should really preach those too every now and then, especially during the Advent mid-week services.... And with that we dispose of most of the pages of the Bible for most of the church year.<sup>4</sup>

Another contributing factor to the neglect of preaching the Old Testament is that the “ancient” or “historic” Divine Service pericopes taken over by Luther from the Roman series and adapted for his *Church Postils* included few Old Testament selections. For many years, there was no Old Testament course of reading systematically followed in either Roman Catholic or Lutheran Churches.<sup>5</sup> In the *Lutheran Hymnal*, the Old Testament lessons were not listed in the section of the hymnal where the other propers of the day, such as the Gospels and the Epistles, introits, collects, and gradual are found. Instead they are sandwiched in the middle of the lectionary chart on pages 159–60, between the first series and the second series of Gospels and Epistles.<sup>6</sup>

The source of the Old Testament readings listed with the one-year series in *The Lutheran Hymnal* was a Commission on Common Liturgy, comprised of representatives from various Lutheran church bodies in the later half of the nineteenth century, which now are part of the ELCA.<sup>7</sup> How were these Old Testament lessons selected? To some extent, the commission followed other Old Testament series formulated in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as the Nitsch, Thomasius, Eisenach, and Swedish series.<sup>8</sup> The pericopes were chosen to compliment the “ancient” Gospels and Epistles. For this reason, preachers may expect to find in them points of contact with the Gospel and Epistle lessons. However, it is “not always easy to see a clear relationship between the Old Testament reading and Gospel for the Day, which usually sets the key theme for a Sunday.”<sup>9</sup> Wendland finds some

<sup>4</sup> Daniel M. Deutschlander, “Preaching Old Testament Texts,” *Preach the Word* 7, no. 2 (November/December 2003): 1.

<sup>5</sup> Wendland, “The ILCW Series,” 1. The practice of assigning certain Gospel and Epistle readings to the various Sundays, festivals and saints’ days has been followed since the time of Jerome (ca. 347–420). His lectionary may have provided the basis for the Roman Ordo, the selections used by Gregory the Great (540–604) whose writings include forty homilies on the ancient Gospel selections. This Roman series, with some modification came into general use in the time of Charlemagne (d. 814).

<sup>6</sup> *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 159–60.

<sup>7</sup> Wendland, “The ILCW Series,” 1; Ernst H., Wendland, *Sermon Texts* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1984), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Wendland, “The ILCW Series,” 1. These series are found in Paul Nesper, *Biblical Texts* (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1952).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

improvement in this respect in the Old Testament series prepared by Frederick H. K. Soll and adopted by the Synodical Conference in 1912, although even in that series, “a close relationship between the Gospel and Old Testament readings is also somewhat obscure at times.”<sup>10</sup>

The three-year series prepared by the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW) tries to remedy this situation. In the ILCW series, the Old Testament reading is restored to a more prominent position and recommended for regular reading as the “First Lesson” for each Sunday. Since the Gospel is chosen to fit the various seasons and festivals of the church year and sets forth the central thought for the Sunday, the Old Testament text for each Sunday suits this same overall theme and specific purpose.<sup>11</sup> As an explanatory booklet on the ILCW’s choice of Scripture lessons explains, “In almost every instance the Old Testament passage was chosen because it relates to the Gospel. Sometimes it relates to the Epistle, or in rare cases to both.”<sup>12</sup>

*The Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, in its arrangement of hymns, list of collects, introits, and graduals, follows the historic one-year lectionary.<sup>13</sup> This spring, as I was teaching Bethany freshmen about the Service of the Word and where the readings come from, I distributed the chart of the Historic Series from *ELH*.<sup>14</sup> I asked the class, “What do you notice about the Old Testament lessons in this series of readings?” A student gave the response I was expecting: “These are almost all from the prophets.” This led me to tally the readings, and according to my count, there are sixty readings from the prophets included for Sundays and festivals and sixteen from historical or narrative sections. Of these

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. The Soll Series and Synodical Conference Series are found in Nesper, *Biblical Texts* and in Wendland, *Sermon Texts*.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. William Willimon terms the three year-series’ handling of the Old Testament the lectionary’s “Achilles’ heel.” Lloyd Bailey points out six deficiencies of Old Testament texts in modern Christian lectionaries: 1) smothering the distinctive voice of the Old Testament in favor of themes imported from NT passages, 2) deliberate censorship of individual verses deemed offensive to Christian sensibilities, 3) improper unit division, 4) little continuity of one week’s reading with the next, 5) the small percentage of Old Testament text selected as readings, and 6) reduced diversity of readings due to recycling of a number of Old Testament passages for thematic purposes. See Scott Callahan, “Old Testament Preaching from the Lectionary: Challenge, Case Study, and Reflection,” *The Expository Times* 124, no. 12 (2013): 582–83.

<sup>12</sup> *Booklet No. 6 on Contemporary Worship: The Church Year—Calendar and Lectionary*, 22 quoted in Wendland, “The ILCW Series,” 1.

<sup>13</sup> It does include the ILCW 3-year lectionary on pages 199–201, with suggested psalms, hymns, and collects.

<sup>14</sup> *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, ed. Worship Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (St. Louis, MO: MorningStar Music Publishers, 1996), 202–3.

prophetic sections, thirty are from Isaiah. Eleven texts are from the Pentateuch and two from Wisdom literature. In my opinion, there is a notable lack of narratives included in this series. “Given the increasing lack of biblical literacy within our society and even within the church,”<sup>15</sup> this is cause for concern.

How does one incorporate narratives, Bible history stories, into your preaching schedule, even if you use the one-year series? In recent years, since it is included in the *Pastoral Desk Diary*,<sup>16</sup> I have been making use of the one-year series as revised for the *Lutheran Service Book*.<sup>17</sup> In the *LSB* one-year series, all the historic Gospel lessons remain intact. All the historic epistles are included, with an alternate epistle lesson suggested in some cases. In the case of the Old Testament, “Since the historic lectionary did not have assigned Old Testament readings, the committee took greater freedom in choosing these texts.”<sup>18</sup> In their selection of Old Testament readings, “the committee attempted to choose Old Testament readings that relate closely to the Holy Gospel.”<sup>19</sup> In addition, “they attempted to provide a balanced selection of various genres of Old Testament readings (e.g., prophetic writings and historical narrative).”<sup>20</sup> In our synod, the Rev. Glenn Obenberger has prepared an Old Testament Bible history lectionary that is almost entirely narratives and corresponds with the teaching themes of the historic one-year lectionary.<sup>21</sup> This lectionary takes the congregation through Old

<sup>15</sup> The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “Lectionary Series,” The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, accessed May 13, 2019, <https://www.lcms.org/worship/lectionary-series>.

<sup>16</sup> *Pastoral Desk Diary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2018).

<sup>17</sup> The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “Lectionary Series.” The LCMS lectionary committee notes historic one year lectionary included in the *Lutheran Service Book* since: 1) we are an historic church and acknowledge the value of what has been handed down to us already in the fourth century, readings arranged according to the Church’s calendar and are intended to be read at the regular, weekly gathering of God’s people. 2) It is important to recognize the value or repetition. “Given the increasing lack of biblical literacy within our society and even within the church, there may be a need in the future for a One-Year Lectionary, with its yearly repetition of key biblical texts.” While relatively few LCMS congregations currently use the one year lectionary, “It is included in the hymnal in order to serve both those who still faithfully use it and those who may one day find that their situation could best be served by the repetition inherent in this lectionary.” 3) The One-year lectionary is unique in that there are a number of older resources that support it, including, hymnody, sermons by Luther and others, etc.

<sup>18</sup> The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, “Lectionary Series.”

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Glenn Obenberger, “Old Testament Lectionary,” Evangelical Lutheran Synod, accessed May 13, 2019, [https://els.org/wp-content/download/worship\\_committee/](https://els.org/wp-content/download/worship_committee/)

Testament history in one year and contains more *lectio continuo* than other one-year Old Testament series.

## II. Telling the story

Preachers have long recognized advantages and benefits to using stories or illustrations in their sermonizing. Stories may be used to clarify a point, apply a principle, or wake up a sleepy congregation. Stories help make sermons clear, relevant, and interesting.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, Deuel observes, “Many seem uncomfortable in preaching narrative as story, perhaps fearing to appear ridiculous or sound condescending.”<sup>23</sup> As a result, preachers often refrain from preaching narrative or reduce the narrative to propositions, using the stereotypical three points without dealing with the story’s plot or allowing the story to have its full impact on the reader. Such restructuring is unnecessary and counterproductive since, “Narrative makes its own point(s) in an interesting and effective manner, while the selection and arrangement of the story details provide clues for finding them.”<sup>24</sup>

Nearly one-third of the Bible is written as narrative. However, Deuel argues, “The advantages of preaching from this type of passage have not been fully realized because preachers have not preached the sections just as they are in the text.”<sup>25</sup> Such advantages of preaching Old Testament narratives include: 1) intrinsic interest involved in such stories, 2) the patterned nature of the stories, 3) the timeless truths illustrated in the stories, and 4) the way the stories lend themselves to easy application.<sup>26</sup> In the second of a series of articles, urging preaching the Old Testament, Deutschlander comments,

Perhaps we will become so comfortable with it that instead of yielding to the temptation of bothering people with stories from our lives as ways of demonstrating some truth, we will use stories from the Bible. Perhaps we can help our people to see themselves and our great God and Savior still more clearly from the people and

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Obenberger-Glenn-OT-Lectinary.pdf. This series is also included in the appendix in a side-by-side comparison chart with the ELH/TLH one year series and LSB one year series Old Testament lessons.

<sup>22</sup> David C. Deuel, “Suggestions for Expository Preaching Old Testament Narrative,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 46, <https://www.tms.edu/m/tmsj2c.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Deuel, “Suggestions for,” 46.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

promises of the Old Testament, so that they too will use it more in their own reading and meditation. All of that will be worthwhile effort, blessed by the Spirit who inspired the Old Testament and intended it for our benefit.<sup>27</sup>

Regarding these benefits, he continues,

Each story makes the point that God is serious about His Word, both the law and the gospel. Each story illustrates the truth that grace is always undeserved, that we live by faith, and that we walk as pilgrims under the cross. And at the same time each story is unique and sharpens our understanding of those eternal truths just a little bit more. It is part of the art of the preacher of the Word that he is always looking for what makes these inspired words, this particular story, unique. He is always asking the text: What are you doing here? Of all the things that God could have said, could have told us about, why this? That quest from week to week deepens from year to year the pastor's awe in the presence of the Word and his zeal to study it always again with the wonder of one reading it for the first time.<sup>28</sup>

*Narrative has literary power.* Biblical narrative combines qualities of literature and history. Each "story" is history told in story-like form. "God led these writers to include what He wanted recorded and to do it in the way He wanted it recorded and without error. Because narrative blends features of history and literature, the story is the best format for preaching the narrative in the form God gave."<sup>29</sup> In other words, "to capitalize on this gold mine of preaching material, preach the story line."<sup>30</sup>

"Story-line" is the plot or general plan of a story.<sup>31</sup> Each Bible story has a *plot*. The story follows a prescribed but general pattern that identifies it as a story: a series of events that can be seen to have a beginning, a middle, and an end. The plot traces the movement of events and episodes and moves toward a climax and some type of resolution. These

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<sup>27</sup> Daniel M. Deutschlander, "Preaching Old Testament Texts II," *Preach the Word* 7, no. 3 (January/February 2004): 4.

<sup>28</sup> Deutschlander, "Preaching Old Testament Texts," 3.

<sup>29</sup> Deuel, "Suggestions for," 49.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>31</sup> See footnote 4.

events that took place at a particular place and time are *scenes*.<sup>32</sup> As he studies a narrative, a preacher may mark off the scenes that comprise the story. He will then note the deliberate arrangement of all its parts, how they fit together and interrelate: the unity of the story, the themes, the plot, and the emphases. “By preaching the story, the expositor can simplify a potentially complex task of representing patterns and preserve the narrative’s patterned quality most effectively.”<sup>33</sup>

“If the preacher’s goal is to be expositional, what is more expositional than preaching the text in its story-line form?”<sup>34</sup> For example, preaching on 1 Samuel 17:40–51, David and Goliath, my sermon parts followed the plot and scenes of the story: 1) the challenge, 2) the warrior, and 3) the victory. On the Sunday in Lent closest to Purim, I preached the story of Esther, summarizing the major plot points to point out how God’s plan for the deliverance of His people from annihilation was carried out. I also connected this story to the story of God’s deliverance of the world from sin through the sending of His Son Jesus, born from the people that Haman wanted annihilated. Another literary feature in this story is *irony*, as Haman is hung on the same gallows he prepared for Mordecai.

“Following the story line facilitates a grasp of some of the characteristics of narrative.”<sup>35</sup> One feature of narrative is a *point of view*, the perspective from which the story is told or lens through which the reader, interpreter, and expositor may relate to the acts and events of each scene.<sup>36</sup> “*Dialogue* plays such a central part that one can often find in the speech of one of the leading persons in the narrative the point of view of the whole passage.”<sup>37</sup> *Characterization* is the use of characters and the movement of the narrative in the characters’ actions and speeches. Kaiser notes that it is as impossible to portray a character apart from the events, as it is to depict the events apart from the characters.<sup>38</sup>

*Setting*, locating the plot and the characters in the time/space world they inhabit, may pose a challenge for today’s preachers. As Murray writes, “We can’t assume that people know anything today about Old Testament books. We’ve got to do a lot of education before we

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<sup>32</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Preaching and Teaching From the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 64.

<sup>33</sup> Deuel, “Suggestions for,” 52.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Kaiser, *Preaching*, 67.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

get to edification. Because of that, it's probably best to start with the familiar stories and passages, because that will need less background information."<sup>39</sup> Part of sermon preparation is looking at the history, geography, and culture of the particular text. The *Lutheran Study Bible* gives excellent summaries that set each book in its context, and *Connecting Sinai to Calvary* by Jeske treats aspects of the Old Testament world topically.<sup>40</sup> Murray gives these words of advice, "We need to give our hearers the background information that honors the original setting but we must learn how to do it with brevity and relevance."<sup>41</sup>

Another notable feature of narratives are key words or *Leitwörter* that are repeated throughout the account. Genesis 22 repeats the phrase "your son, your only son" three times (vv. 2, 12, 16). This repetition emphasizes that this is an important aspect of the story and an interpretive key and connects the story to Christ, "the only begotten Son" of John 3:16. Other examples of repetition in narratives are the words in Judges, "In those days there was no king, everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 17:6 and 21:26) and the division marker in Genesis, "this is the account of."

*Narrative is timeless and universal.* Biblical narratives convey historical information and relay facts but also guide perspective and a response to events.<sup>42</sup> According to Leland Ryken, "Biblical narrative assumes 'that what happens to the characters in the story is somehow a model of the enduring human situation.'"<sup>43</sup> This "subtly prescriptive quality of biblical narrative" is part of what "makes it inherently 'sermonic.'"<sup>44</sup> To "state the author's propositions, arguments, narrations, and illustrations in timeless abiding truths with special focus on the application of those truths to the current needs of the Church" is called "principlizing."<sup>45</sup> But not all that occurs in narrative is truly timeless. We must carefully distinguish between what is prescriptive and descriptive. Many of the details are culture specific, such as the sacrifices and offerings that were

<sup>39</sup> David Murray, "7 Tips on Teaching and Preaching the Old Testament," Place for Truth, accessed April 18, 2019, <https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/7-tips-on-teaching-and-preaching-the-old-testament>.

<sup>40</sup> John C. Jeske, *Connecting Sinai to Calvary* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> Murray, "7 Tips." Also helpful in this regard is Matt Ewart, "Preaching to the Biblically Ignorant Without Seeming Biblically Arrogant," *Preach the Word* 19, no. 3 (January/February 2016).

<sup>42</sup> Deuel, "Suggestions for," 52.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Deuel, "Suggestions for," 53.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>45</sup> Walter Kaiser in Deuel, "Suggestions for," 53.



prescribed for Israel under the ceremonial law. “The tendency to become overly prescriptive or exemplary to the exclusion of the Bible’s forward movement in redemption history must be avoided.”<sup>46</sup>

*Narrative relates experience.* A major distinction between historical writing and biblical narrative is that in historical writing the objective is to tell what happened, while biblical narratives aim to impact readers with what happens. “They provide a vicarious experience of the truth to be taught, and thus they move persons to identify with and live by that truth.”<sup>47</sup> “In short, narrative as story is very application-oriented.”<sup>48</sup>

*Narrative is difficult to reduce.* Reduction is the process whereby the expositor takes a larger and more detailed block of text and summarizes it, perhaps in a brief single sentence, clause, or word.<sup>49</sup> Biblical narratives are complete stories. How wise is it to reduce biblical narratives to sermon propositions and points? “If the biblical writer intended a strictly propositional format to communicate his message, why did he employ narrative?”<sup>50</sup> Arguably, narrative communicates the message better.<sup>51</sup> Take, for example, Old Testament pedagogy. Many of the symbols, rituals, monuments, and feasts of the Old Testament were designed to prompt children to ask questions, such as, “What does this rite mean to you?” (Exodus 12:26) or “What do these stones mean to you?” (Joshua 4:6). The teaching response was almost always a story.

In his “Suggestions for Expository Preaching of Old Testament Narrative,” David C. Deuel cautions against the following approaches to narrative texts: 1) an artificial structure must not be imposed upon them, 2) they are not to be solely used as resource of illustrations for the rest of the Bible, and 3) they are not just examples of obeying or disobeying God’s law.

Deuel warns against “biographical sermons,” sermons that focus primarily on the behavior or character of an individual in a narrative. Such a focus may lead the preacher to miss the passage’s major theological emphases. For example, while some narratives prescribe behavior, the Joseph story is not just the story of how young people should be or behave. Focusing on Joseph as a moral exemplar would be to exchange the story’s unifying structure for the preacher’s own

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<sup>46</sup> Deuel, “Suggestions for,” 53.

<sup>47</sup> Henry Mitchell quoted in Deuel, “Suggestions for,” 54.

<sup>48</sup> Deuel, “Suggestions for,” 54.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*



conceptual structure.<sup>52</sup> To focus on Joseph's behavior would not be preaching Genesis 37–50. The expositor should not indiscriminately use Joseph or any other Biblical character as an example.

Instead, "When preaching narrative, one should take the spotlight off the Joseph-like heroes and shine it on the only praise-worthy character of the story, God."<sup>53</sup> Expositors need to ask the question: "Is this all the narrative teaches?" "Is this what the narrative was intended to teach?"<sup>54</sup> The grace of God, clearly prominent in the Joseph story, would be omitted by an exclusive attention to human works. A sermon reflecting the story's true emphasis must take the complete message, the role of Joseph within God's plan of salvation. Joseph's response to his brother's pleas for forgiveness pointedly summarizes the details of the whole story. "But as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20). With the focus of the story placed on God, "those to whom he preaches will make God the focus of their life stories."<sup>55</sup> With the focus on God's grace in Christ, rather than Joseph as moral exemplar, growth in sanctification may result. "As a byproduct, human behavior will probably improve also, and not just in a threefold way to correspond to a three-point message."<sup>56</sup>

Another mistaken approach to preaching Old Testament narratives, pointed out by Deuel, is using the narrative only to illustrate principles found in other Old Testament passages or the New Testament. While New Testament writers use characters, events, and all kinds of phenomena from the Old Testament as illustrations, "Nevertheless this does not prove that incorporation of details of an Old Testament narrative for illustrative purposes is *the way to preach* that Old Testament narrative."<sup>57</sup> The original historical and biblical context must be kept in mind. "An Old Testament narrative as a textual unit presented an entire theological message to its original audience."<sup>58</sup> In its original context, "it may have called for an ethical change, either directly or indirectly. Or it may move the history of redemption forward, demonstrating how

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 59.

God's redemptive purpose is at work in the world. Should it not do the same in sermons today?"<sup>59</sup>

A proper distinction needs to be made in our preaching and teaching of the Old Testament between what is prescriptive and descriptive. The preacher "should find clear admonitions of 'do or believe this' or 'do not do or believe this' elsewhere in Scripture before drawing on narrative illustrations to elaborate on the point."<sup>60</sup> For example, adopting the theology of Job's counselors would not be wise.

What is the best way to preach biblical narrative? Deuel answers, "Perhaps the easiest, most effective way, the way truest to the biblical form, is just to retell the story, allowing the story itself to heighten points of application."<sup>61</sup> "In most cases, presenting the narrative as story is technically the easiest, exegetically the safest, rhetorically the most effective, and lends itself to the most natural application."<sup>62</sup> "Moreover, developing the sermon in the same form as the text will enable the congregation all the better to follow the exposition of the text and to remember the sermon."<sup>63</sup> Attempts to handle narrative sections in other than a story-line format may account for the frustration of expositors in trying to preach narrative. "Which has more impact, hearing an abstract proposition" about God's grace, mercy, or providence, or "seeing it borne out in the experience of God's people?"<sup>64</sup>

Approaching an Old Testament narrative, I would suggest that the preacher keep in mind these questions I developed over the years to aid Sunday School teachers in their lesson preparation:

- Where is this story found?
- Who are the characters?
- What's wrong here? What sin is shown in the lives of the characters?
  - How does their example show me my sin and failings?  
(Law)
- How does this story point us to Jesus?
  - Where's Jesus in the story?
  - What quality of Jesus is shown in this story? His power? His wisdom, etc. as God?

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 61.

- How is Jesus' saving work displayed in this story? How is He rescuing someone? How is He forgiving someone? (Gospel)
  - Every Bible story is about Jesus!

### III. Connecting to Christ

When preaching from the historical books, Deutschlander writes, "Task #1 is to find the gospel in many of them and to keep from moralizing in the rest of them."<sup>65</sup> Sidney Greidanus shares an embarrassing personal example of this. As a young preacher, he preached a series from Ecclesiastes and a retired preacher in his congregation commented, "Could a rabbi have preached your sermon in a synagogue?"<sup>66</sup> This comment called into question whether his sermon was distinctively Christian, whether he had preached Christ. In his article, "Preaching Christ from the Old Testament," Greidanus promotes a method of interpreting the Old Testament that is redemptive-historical and Christocentric.

Greidanus warns against two ditches to avoid, just preaching about God, which is too broad, and twisting the Scripture in order to preach Christ from a particular Old Testament text. He suggests that if we define "preaching Christ" too narrowly, meaning only to referring to Christ's crucifixion, we could end up allegorizing to the point that every time a piece of wood or tree is mentioned in the Old Testament is a foreshadowing of the cross.<sup>67</sup> "Allegorical interpretation fails to transmit the message of the inspired writer, and instead it reads New Testament ideas back into the Old Testament text."<sup>68</sup> In doing so, we run the risk of abandoning the message of the Old Testament historical texts and preaching only the New Testament lessons. Instead, our first move is to establish the grammatical historical meaning of the text and what it meant for Israel. Only after we have established the text's meaning for Israel "can we then seek to understand this message in the context of the whole biblical canon and redemptive history."<sup>69</sup> This second move opens

<sup>65</sup> Deutschlander, "Preaching Old Testament Texts," 1.

<sup>66</sup> Sidney Greidanus, "Preaching Christ From the Old Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161, no. 641 (January-March 2004): 3.

<sup>67</sup> Greidanus, "Preaching Christ," 5. Greidanus comments, "Starting with an Old Testament passage, many preachers somehow miraculously land at Calvary."

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

up the various ways in which the Old Testament message links up with the person, work, and/or teaching of Jesus.<sup>70</sup>

Greidanus suggests broadening the definition of “preaching Christ” to also include the “teaching of Jesus.”<sup>71</sup> Jesus’ teachings in the Gospels include such topics as God, the kingdom of God, Jesus Himself and His mission, salvation, God’s Law and believers’ responsibilities and mission. Greidanus proposes the following definition: “Preaching Christ from the Old Testament is to preach sermons that authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God’s revelation in the person, work, and/or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament.”<sup>72</sup> This definition of “preaching Christ” includes “not only preaching Jesus’ crucifixion but also His resurrection, His ascension, His present rule at the right hand of the Father, and His coming again to establish God’s kingdom in perfection.”<sup>73</sup> Such an approach to “preaching Christ” opens up a whole range of links from the Old Testament to Christ in the New Testament.

The famed preacher Charles Spurgeon once used the analogy that just as in England, there is a road from every town and village and hamlet to London, “so from every text of Scripture there is a road to Christ. And my dear brother, your business is, when you get to a text, to say, now, what is the road to Christ?”<sup>74</sup> “We must consciously look for a way, a road, from the message of this Old Testament text to Jesus Christ in the New Testament.”<sup>75</sup> Following Spurgeon’s advise, Greidanus finds that there are basically seven legitimate roads to Christ in the Old Testament. Some Old Testament passages have only one legitimate road to Him while others offer all seven possibilities. “Preachers should therefore select for the sermon two or three roads to Christ that are in line with the theme of the sermon,”<sup>76</sup> found in the text itself.

### 1. *The way of redemptive-historical progression*

As demonstrated by *The Story*,<sup>77</sup> the Bible sketches a continuous redemptive history with Christ at its center. “In preaching an Old

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Greidanus, “Preaching Christ,” 9.

<sup>75</sup> Greidanus, “Preaching Christ,” 9.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>77</sup> *The Story: The Bible as One Continuing Story of God and His People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

Testament historical narrative, therefore, we need to pay attention to the progression in redemptive history from this Old Testament event to the climax of God's redemptive acts in Jesus' first and second comings.<sup>78</sup> In doing so, "We learn to see the Old Testament narratives not merely as biographies of interesting characters but as parts of the national history of Israel, which in turn is part of the history of the coming kingdom of God and its King, Jesus Christ."<sup>79</sup> For example, the story of Noah is more than just a warning about God's judgment about sin, it is about God preserving the line of the Savior, and providing salvation for those who are justified by faith in the coming Savior. When one preaches on God's acts of redemption in the Exodus from Egypt, one cannot stop at the Old Testament redemptive act but move on to God's ultimate redemptive act in Jesus. "Every text must be understood and preached in its broader redemptive-historical and canonical contexts."<sup>80</sup>

## 2. *The way of promise-fulfillment*

"Promise-fulfillment" is a direct road to Christ from an Old Testament text. The Old Testament contains hundreds of rectilinear prophecies of the coming Messiah. The Gospel writer Matthew writes twelve times about Jesus "fulfilling" Old Testament promises. An example is Matthew 1:22–23, "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)." Not only does the New Testament make clear that Jesus' birth fulfills Old Testament promises, but also His preaching and miracles, suffering and death, resurrection and ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

## 3. *The way of typology*

Types are "Old Testament shadows which direct us to New Testament concrete realities."<sup>81</sup> God's gracious provision of redemption in Christ is foreshadowed in Old Testament events, persons, and institutions that prefigure the person or work of Christ in His first and second comings.<sup>82</sup> Such types include sacrificial lambs, which point to Christ, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29),

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>81</sup> Gaylin R. Schmeling, *From Wilderness to Promised Land* (Mankato, MN: Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary Press, 2012), 7.

<sup>82</sup> Greidanus, "Preaching Christ," 11. See also Schmeling, *From Wilderness*, 7.

the bronze serpent which points to the lifting up of Christ on the Cross (John 3:14–15), and Adam, a type of the One to come, Christ the Second Adam (Romans 5:14). The writer to Hebrews demonstrates that Aaron, Moses, Joshua, Melchizedek, sacrifices, etc. are all types of Christ. Since “typology has its origin in God’s own foreknowledge of history,” “the Scripture contains a number of major themes that run through the Old and New Testaments.”<sup>83</sup> Among the most important of these typological themes are the Creation/Re-creation theme, the David theme, and the Exodus theme. A number of typological sermons on the Exodus theme are included in the book *From Wilderness to Promised Land* by Gaylin Schmeling, centering on “Israel’s deliverance from bondage in Egypt, Jesus the New Israel, and the church as spiritual Israel.”<sup>84</sup>

The Lenten season lends itself most naturally to typological preaching from the Old Testament. On the first Sunday in Lent, we have the first Adam tempted in the Garden by the serpent, and falling into sin, listening to Satan’s lying words rather than God’s Word. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus, the second Adam, also faces the tempter, this time in the opposite of the Garden, a barren wilderness. Rather than listening to the serpent’s words as Adam did, Jesus uses God’s Word to withstand the devil’s temptations and send him packing. An alternate Old Testament lesson for the first Sunday in Lent is the account of David and Goliath from 1 Samuel 17:40–51. The helpless looking young David defeats the giant Goliath in an unexpected way, with a sling and a few smooth stones. The emaciated Jesus, looking more like a worm than a man, uses the Word to defeat our Goliath, the devil.<sup>85</sup> On the fourth Sunday in Lent, an alternate Old Testament lesson is Exodus 16:2–21, God providing His people manna from heaven in the wilderness. The historic Gospel from John 6:1–16 is Jesus miraculously feeding the five thousand. In the same chapter, Jesus explains that He is the Bread from heaven. Unlike the Israelites who ate the manna and died, when we eat of Him by faith, we will live forever. While some accounts have more than one point of comparison, “One must take

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<sup>83</sup> Schmeling, *From Wilderness*, 7.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> “When one preaches on the great king David, one cannot stop at the type but must necessarily move on to its New Testament antitype, the great son of David, Jesus Christ.” Greidanus, “Preaching Christ,” 9.

care not to flatten the Old Testament stories that foreshadow Christ by making all details align.”<sup>86</sup>

#### 4. *The way of analogy*

According to Greidanus, analogy is more general than typology and “exposes parallels between what God taught Israel and what Christ teaches the church; what God promised Israel and what God promises the church; what God demanded of Israel (the Law) and what Christ demands of his church.”<sup>87</sup> An example of analogy is the Psalmist’s, “The Lord is my Shepherd” (23:1). Through Christ’s work as the Good Shepherd, this same Lord is the believer’s Shepherd today (John 10). Jesus told the story of Noah as an analogy (Matthew 24:37–41), urging people to repent and thereby escape the coming judgment.

#### 5. *The way of longitudinal themes*

This fifth road to Christ from the Old Testament is similar to the “redemptive-historical” method, but refers to themes that can be traced throughout the Scriptures from the Old Testament to their culmination in Christ in the New Testament. Every major theme leads to Christ, such as God’s coming kingdom, God’s covenant, God’s redemption, God’s presence, God’s love, God’s faithfulness, God’s grace, God’s judgment, and God’s people.<sup>88</sup> One longitudinal theme that is often preached is God’s Law and Christ who lived God’s Law perfectly and fulfilled the Law for us. This year on Transfiguration Day, picking up on the “tabernacles” theme in the Gospel, I preached on Exodus 40, the setting up of the tabernacle. I traced the longitudinal theme of God’s presence: in the tabernacle, later the temple, then Jesus, who “tabernacled among us” in the flesh (John 1:14), and God dwelling with us in the new heavens and new earth in Revelation 21.

#### 6. *The way of New Testament references*

Another road to Christ is found in New Testament passages that quote Old Testament passages or allude to them. If these are not immediately apparent in the text, a cross-reference Bible or concordance can help one locate them. Greidanus adds a caveat about using the way of New Testament references, that the New Testament writers did not

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<sup>86</sup> Trevin Wax, “7 Ways of Preaching Christ from the Old Testament,” The Gospel Coalition, June 4, 2013, accessed April 18, 2019, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/7-ways-of-preaching-christ-from-the-old-testament/>.

<sup>87</sup> Greidanus, “Preaching Christ,” 12.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

always seek to interpret Old Testament passages but simply used them to illustrate the point they wished to make.”<sup>89</sup> As an example of this, Greidanus points to Paul’s allegory in Galatians 4:21–31 concerning Hagar and Sarah and the present, enslaved Jerusalem and the free Jerusalem above. Greidanus opines that in our sermonizing it is best “to do our work first with the above five ways and then investigate whether the New Testament supports any of these ways to Christ.”<sup>90</sup> He further suggests, “Frequently we can build a solid bridge to Christ by combining the way we discerned, for example, promise-fulfillment, with a New Testament reference.”<sup>91</sup>

### 7. *The way of contrast*

As a result of Christ’s coming, there are aspects of Old Testament teaching that stand in sharp contrast to the message of the New Testament. For example, on *Judica*, the Fifth Sunday in Lent, I preached on Leviticus 16, the Day of Atonement. I emphasized that the Day of Atonement was repeated year after year, as thousands of animals were slaughtered to atone for the people. In addition, the curtain of the tabernacle was a physical barrier between the holy God and sinful human beings. In the New Testament, Christ sacrificed Himself once and for all, and the curtain was torn in two from top to bottom. By Christ’s death, the barrier of sin between us and God has been removed.

Other contrasts would include: In the Old Testament, all eight-day-old males were to be circumcised to be part of the covenant relationship with God, but the New Testament releases people from this requirement (Acts 15). In the Old Testament, God commanded that His people celebrate the Passover each year. In the context of the Passover meal, Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper as its fulfillment, and the Passover is no longer required of Christians. Deutschlander comments, “Apart from the pictures of Christ in some of the sacrifices, much of the ceremonial law may do little more for us than display God’s extraordinary standard of holiness and our corresponding distance from it. Even if we never preach on it, the ceremonial law may move us to marvel all the more at the condescension of the Son of God in becoming one of us. Or it may provoke us to still more gratitude for the gospel which has freed us from the impossible burden of the whole of the law.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 12–13.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Deutschlander, “Preaching Old Testament Texts,” 3.



Since contrast focuses on discontinuity rather than on continuity it is usually preferable to use one or more of the positive ways to move to Christ in the New Testament. As I was teaching the freshman religion class a unit on atonement this semester, we read Old Testament passages on atonement and then New Testament passages from Paul's epistles. For their written assignment, students were asked, "In what ways does Paul build on the Old Testament concept of atonement? How does he differ? Are the Old Testament and New Testament concepts of atonement and justification agreed?" To my dismay, most students emphasized the way of contrast—that we no longer have animal sacrifice—rather than the way of typology. When preaching on a text calling for animal sacrifice, it is better to use typology, which acknowledges the continuity as well as the discontinuity as a way to Christ.<sup>93</sup> Animals sacrificed to atone for sin were a type of Christ who would offer His life for us once and for all.

### **Conclusion: Why preach the Old Testament?**

We are called to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). The Old Testament is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). As Lutherans we recognize that God's inspired Word is not only inerrant but also a means of grace through which the Holy Spirit creates and strengthens our faith. 2 Timothy 3:14–17 gives us at least four functions for which the Holy Spirit uses "all Scripture," including the Old Testament: "teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness," making us "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." The Old Testament leads us to the Messiah, who is the heart of the Old Testament. Jesus says of the Old Testament Scriptures, "these are they that testify of Me" (John 5:39). On the road to Emmaus, Jesus, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets," "explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). The Old Testament deals with the questions of life.

If we start with the warranted assumption that God did not waste words in his Word and that he let none fall idly from his lips, then we will take the attitude Samuel also to the Old Testament texts: 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening' (1 Samuel 3:10). And the assumption is a warranted one. Of all the billions of things that God could have recorded in his Word, he had these stories and prophecies and songs

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<sup>93</sup> Greidanus, "Preaching Christ," 13.

and Law and Gospel pictures recorded. Why? Because they have an eternal relevance for our lives of faith, for all people of all times.<sup>94</sup>

Deutschlander observes, “We dispose of those inspired books way too quickly, and that in spite of our heritage, so rich in its use of Old Testament texts.”<sup>95</sup> Well-known is St. Augustine’s view that the Old Testament is the indispensable cradle of the New and the New Testament is the interpreter of the Old. Luther’s eight volume commentary on Genesis “contains an inexhaustible supply of practical applications of Old Testament texts within the framework of major Reformation themes, i.e., justification, the primacy of the Word as the gospel means of grace, the theology of the cross.”<sup>96</sup> In recent years, two volumes of Johann Gerhard’s *Postilla* have been translated into English.<sup>97</sup> Many of Gerhard’s sermons even on New Testament texts “begin with some reference to an Old Testament Bible story or prophecy. It is as though Gerhard did not think a sermon complete without some significant use of the Old Testament.”<sup>98</sup>

By a wider use of the Old Testament in our preaching, with readings from various genres and relating to the Gospel lessons, our hearers can better see the “gradual working out of God’s plan of salvation, the Messianic promises and prophecies, the significance of the various names of God, the portions which are interpreted by Jesus and His Apostles in the New Testament.”<sup>99</sup> All this provides “important Gospel content and insight into what God has done and is doing for our salvation.”<sup>100</sup> LSQ

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<sup>94</sup> Deutschlander, “Preaching Old Testament Texts,” 2.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Postilla: An Explanation of the Sunday and Most Important Festival Gospels of the Whole Year*, trans. Elmer M. Hohle and O. Marc Tanger, ed. Heidi D. Sias, 4 vols. (Malone, TX and Fort Wayne, IN: The Center for the Study of Lutheran Orthodoxy, Repristination Press, and Lutheran Legacy, 2003–12).

<sup>98</sup> Deutschlander, “Preaching Old Testament Texts,” 1.

<sup>99</sup> Wendland, *Sermon Texts*, 1.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

## Appendix: One-Year Series Old Testament Readings

Sunday/ Festival	ELH/TLH	LSB	Bible History Lectionary by Rev. Glenn Obenberger
Advent 1	Jer. 33:14–18	Jer. 23:5–8	Genesis 3:14–4:2
Advent 2	Micah 4:1–7	Mal. 4:1–6	Genesis 6:9–22
Advent 3	Mal. 3: 1–6	Is. 40:1–8 (9–11)	Genesis 8:15–22
Advent 4	Is. 40:1–8	Deut. 18:15–19	Genesis 17:15–22
Christmas Eve Early	Vigil: Is. 7:10–14	Is. 7:10–14	
Christmas Midnight	Vigil: Is. 7:10–14	Is. 9:2–7	
Christmas Dawn	1 <sup>st</sup> : Is. 9:2–7	Micah 5:2–5a	
Christmas Day	2 <sup>nd</sup> : Micah 5:2–4	Ex. 40:17–21, 34–38	Luke 2:1–14 (or 1:67–75)
Christmas 1	Is. 11:1–5	Is. 11:1–5 <i>or</i> 2 Sam. 7:1–16	Genesis 21:1–7
Christmas 2	Is. 42:1–9	Gen. 46:1–7	Genesis 22:1–14
Epiphany	Is. 60;1–6	Is. 60:1–6	Genesis 18:20–33
Epiphany 1	Is. 63:1–3	1 Kings 8:6–13	Genesis 26:1–6
<i>or</i> Baptism of Our Lord	Is. 42:1–9	Joshua 3:1–3, 7–8, 13–17 <i>or</i> Is. 42:1–7	Genesis 27:1–19
Epiphany 2	Dt 18:15–19	Ex. 33:12–23 <i>or</i> Amos 9:11–15	Genesis 29:13–30
Epiphany 3	Jer. 33:6–9	2 Kings 5:1–15a	Genesis 32:22–32
Epiphany 4	Is. 43:1–3	Jonah 1:1–17	Genesis 35:1–7
Epiphany 5	Jer. 17:5–10	Gen. 18:20–33	Genesis 37:17b–36
Transfiguration	Is. 61:10–11	Ex. 34:29–35 <i>or</i> Ex. 3:1–14	Genesis 41:37–43
Septuagesima	Jer. 1:4–10	Ex. 17:1–7	Genesis 50:15–21
Sexagesima	Is. 55:10–13	Is. 55:10–13	Exodus 3:1–20
Quinquagesima	Is. 35:3–7	1 Sam. 16:1–13 <i>or</i> Is. 35:3–7	Exodus 11:1, 12:21–30

<b>Sunday/ Festival</b>	<b>ELH/TLH</b>	<b>LSB</b>	<b>Bible History Lectionary by Rev. Glenn Obenberger</b>
Ash Wednesday	Joel 2:12–19 or Is. 59:12–21	Joel 2:12–19 <i>or</i> Jonah 3:1–10	
Lent 1	Gen. 3:1–24	Gen. 3:1–21 <i>or</i> 1 Sam. 17:40–51	Exodus 14:5–31
Lent 2	Is. 45:20–25	Gen. 32:22–32	Exodus 17:1–16
Lent 3	2 Sam. 22:1–7	Ex. 8:16–24 <i>or</i> Jer. 26:1–15	Exodus 32:1–14
Lent 4	Is. 49:8–13	Ex. 16:2–21 <i>or</i> Is. 49:8–13	Exodus 16:1–3, 11–20
Lent 5	Gen. 12:1–3	Gen. 22:1–14	Exodus 34:29–35
Palm Sunday	Zech. 9:9–10	Zech. 9:9–12	Numbers 21:4–9 <i>or</i> Numbers 22:21–35
Monday in Holy Week	Is. 50:5–10	Is. 50:5–10	
Tuesday in Holy Week	Jer. 11:18–20	Jer. 11:18–20	
Wednesday in Holy Week	Is. 62:11—63:7	Is. 62:11—63:7	
Holy (Maundy) Thursday	Ex. 12:1–14	Ex. 12:1–14 <i>or</i> Ex. 24:3–11	Deuteronomy 31:19–23 <i>or</i> Ex. 12:14/Numbers 9:1–14
Good Friday	Is. 52:13—53:12	Is. 52:13—53:12	Deuteronomy 34 <i>or</i> Numbers 21:4–9
Holy Saturday	Job 14:1–14	Dan. 6:1–24	
Easter Dawn	Vigil: Ex. 14:10–15:1	Is. 25:6–9 <i>or</i> Ex. 14:10–15:1	
Easter Day	1st: Is. 52:13–15	Job 19:23–27	Joshua 3 ( <i>or</i> Mark 16:1–8)
Easter Evening/ Monday	2nd: Hosea 13:14	Ex. 15:1–18	

<b>Sunday/ Festival</b>	<b>ELH/TLH</b>	<b>LSB</b>	<b>Bible History Lectionary by Rev. Glenn Obenberger</b>
Easter 2	Job 19:25–27	Ezek. 37:1–14	Joshua 5:13–6:5
Easter 3	Ezek. 34:11–16	Ezek. 34:11–16	Joshua 21:41–45
Easter 4	Lam 3:18–26	Is. 40:25–31 <i>or</i> Lam. 3:22–33	Judges 2:10–23
Easter 5	Is. 12:1–6	Is. 12:1–6	Judges 7:1–7, 16–21
Easter 6	Jer. 29:11–14	Num. 21:4–9	Judges 16:18–30
Ascension	Isaiah 57:15	2 Kings 2:5–15	1 Samuel 8:1–22
Easter 7	Ezek. 36:25–27	Ezek. 36:22–28	Ruth 1:1–18
Pentecost Eve	Ezek. 36:23–26	Joel 3:1–5	
Pentecost Day	Joel 2:28–32	Gen. 11:1–9	1 Samuel 16:14–23
Pentecost Evening/ Monday	Is. 32:14–20	Is. 57:15–21	
Trinity Sunday	Ezek. 18:30–32	Is. 6:1–7	1 Samuel 17:32–50
Trinity 1	Jer. 9:23,24	Gen. 15:1–6	1 Samuel 24:1–22
Trinity 2	Is. 25:6–9	Prov. 9:1–10	2 Samuel 7:4–16
Trinity 3	Micah 7:18–20	Micah 7:18–20	2 Samuel 11:26–12:13
Trinity 4	Is. 58:6–12	Gen. 50:15–21	2 Samuel 9
Trinity 5	Jer. 16:14=21	1 Kings 19:11–21	2 Samuel 15:1–15
Trinity 6	Ex. 20;1–17	Ex. 20:1–17	2 Samuel 16:4–15
Trinity 7	Jer. 31:23=25	Gen. 2:7–17	1 Kings 3:4–13
Trinity 8	Jer. 15:19–21	Jer. 23:16–29	1 Kings 12:26–33
Trinity 9	1 Chron. 29:10–13	2 Sam. 22:26–34	1 Kings 17:7–24
Trinity 10	Jer. 7:1–7	Jer. 8:4–12 <i>or</i> Jer. 7:1–11	1 Kings 19:16b–39
Trinity 11	2 Sam. 22:21–29	Gen. 4:1–15	1 Kings 19:9b–18
Trinity 12	Is. 29:18–19	Is. 29:17–24	2 Kings 5:1
Trinity 13	Lev. 18:1–5	2 Chron. 28:8–15	2 Kings 5:15c

<b>Sunday/ Festival</b>	<b>ELH/TLH</b>	<b>LSB</b>	<b>Bible History Lectionary by Rev. Glenn Obenberger</b>
Trinity 14	Jer. 17:13–14	Prov. 4:10–23	Job 1:6
Trinity 15	Dt. 6:4–7	1 Kings 17:8–16	1 Kings 21:1
Trinity 16	Dt. 32:39–40	1 Kings 17:17–24	2 Kings 2:1
Trinity 17	1 Sam. 2:1–10	Prov. 25:6–14	Ecclesiastes 3:1
Trinity 18	Dt. 10:12–21	Deut. 10:12–21	Job 19:21
Michaelmas	Gen. 28: 10–22	Daniel 10:10–14; 12:1–3	Isaiah 6
Trinity 19	Is. 44:21–23	Gen. 28:10–17	2 Kings 2:15–25 (or 23–25) or Jeremiah 1:1–10
Trinity 20	Is. 65:1–2	Is. 55:1–9	2 Kings 18:1–12
Trinity 21	Hos. 13:14	Gen. 1:1–2:3	2 Chronicles 32:1–23
Trinity 22	Dt. 7:9–11	Micah 6:6–8	Hosea 3
Trinity 23	Is. 32:1–8	Prov. 8:11–22	Jonah 3&4
Reformation	2 Chron. 29:12–19	FR: Rev. 14:6–7	2 Chronicles 29:12–19
All Saints	Is. 25:6–9	FR: Rev. 7: (1–8), 9–17	Daniel 3:13–28 (or 1–28)
Trinity 24	Is. 51:9–16	Is. 51:9–16	2 Kings 20
Trinity 25	Is. 49:12–17	Ex. 32:1–20 <i>or</i> Job 14:1–6	2 Chronicles 33:1–13
Trinity 26	Is. 40:9–11	Dan. 7:9–14	2 Chronicles 36:11–21
Last Sunday	Is. 65:17–19	Is. 65:17–25	Ezra 1:1–7
Thanksgiving			Malachi 3:6–18



# Ministering to Millennials: The Generation, the Culture

*Peter T. Heyn  
Pastor, Peace Lutheran Church  
Deshler, Ohio*

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**M**ILLENNIALS. GOOGLE THE WORD, AND within seconds you'll have over 97 million hits. Turn on the news and you'll hear about this or that aspect of millennial culture. It's a word that we hear a lot. So what is a millennial?

It is not someone who believes in the earthly reign of Christ either before or after a time of tribulation. No, millennials are the generational cohort between Generations X and Z (and so they are sometimes referred to as Generation Y). The generation goes by numerous nicknames including mosaics, echo boomers, and new boomers among others. There are no precise dates for when the cohort starts or ends. Demographers and researchers typically use the early 1980s (1980–1984) as starting birth years and the mid-1990s to early 2000s (1996–2004) as ending birth years. It is those who have come of age at the turn of the millennium. Because of the variety in the range of birth years, statistics must be understood with some flexibility. For the survey sent out to the pastors of the synod, I took the “narrow Lutheran middle,” setting the parameters of the birth year range as 1982–2002. Using this range, I would be only a borderline millennial. I feel I may fit better in the category of Xenial.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jorrey Varney, accessed July 25, 2018, <https://www.sammichespyschmeds.com/micro-generation-born-between-1977-1983-are-given-new-name/>. In summary, it's a micro-generation of those born between 1977–1983, or when the original Star Wars trilogy was released.



So how relevant is this for us? Most of our Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary graduates over the past 10 years or so are millennials. In the narrow sense (born in or after 1982), we have seventeen ELS pastors that are millennials. In the wide sense (born as early as 1980), we have twenty-five.<sup>2</sup> And what about in our pews? According to the survey that was sent out to the ELS clergy over the summer, respondents reported 2,389 millennials out of 8,074 baptized members in their churches.<sup>3</sup> With less than half the pastors responding (53/135, if you did not respond and your conscience burdens you, it should), we easily estimate at least 5,000 millennials that are members of our synod. That's over twenty-five percent! And the world around us? Numbering 71 million in 2016, millennials in the United States are fast approaching baby boomers (74 million) in population and are projected to surpass them as the nation's largest living adult generation in 2019.<sup>4</sup>

So who are these 71 million plus millennials that now surround us? Is it just an age range within our congregations? Yes, but studies show that this generation especially is trending its way out of our churches. The statistic that comes up time and again is that 59% of millennials who grew up in the church have dropped out.<sup>5</sup> In the last twenty-five years, the percentage of unchurched in America has spiked from 22% to 44% (as of 2016). Millennials are the least likely generation to attend church regularly, with only 28% having attended in the last week.<sup>6</sup> So how can we best carry out our mission to "make disciples of all nations" with the millennial generation?

As we celebrated the centennial anniversary of the ELS, we thanked the Lord for his gracious blessings over the last one hundred years. We thank him for his faithfulness in the face of the changing culture and worldview that our nation and church have seen. Psalm 100:5 reminds us, "For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."<sup>7</sup> His faithfulness is not just to

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<sup>2</sup> This inquiry was made of Elsa Ferkenstad, executive assistant to the president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, on August 16, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> "Millennials in our Midst," created July 26, 2018, <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/3YZQDFB>.

<sup>4</sup> "Fact Tank: News in the Numbers," accessed September 14, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/04/25/7-demographic-trends-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world-in-2018/>.

<sup>5</sup> American Culture and Faith Institute, accessed September 14, 2018, <https://www.culturefaith.com/survey-details-how-the-core-beliefs-and-behaviors-of-millennials-compare-to-those-of-other-adults/>, among others.

<sup>6</sup> Barna Group, *Barna Trends 2017* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 148.

<sup>7</sup> All translations are ESV, unless otherwise noted.

generations past, but generations present and future as well. As we begin our second century of work as a synod, may God bless us as we consider the ways we might best continue our mission of sharing the good news of salvation by grace alone, by faith alone with the world. May he bless us today as we consider the unique features of the millennial generation.

## The Concept of Generations

Obviously, the concept of generations has been around as long as the world. The concept is already addressed throughout the Old Testament (in Hebrew of course), but generational research actually only came into its own after World War II. It was at this time that companies and corporations sought more and better ways to market their products, and so they started categorizing people, and researching general characteristics of their target consumer base. The result?

Cultural concepts of generations are built around how to best sell products to a certain group of people in a certain age range. Instead of generations dealing with the passing of wisdom, knowledge, and love from one to the next, all that can be seen are the differences between the older and the younger for the sake of profit.<sup>8</sup>

The danger, of course, is that each generation is stereotyped, and each individual of that generation is painted in broad strokes that may or may not be fair.

Every twenty years or so a new generation comes along. So we started with the lost generation (which came of age during World War I), and have now cycled through the G. I. Generation, silent generation, baby boomers of the '40s and '50s, Generation Xers of the '60s and '70s, and now the millennials. It should be noted that though millennials seem to be the most discussed generation among us, they are not the youngest. That distinction belongs to so-called Generation Z (GenZ), as it has already been termed.

We all have experiences with millennials. We have millennials in our families, churches, and classrooms. My specific experience includes the fact that I have eight younger siblings, all born between 1981–1994 (so most if not all would be considered millennials). I also bring classroom experience, having attended the School of Education at one of the most liberal universities in the country (definitely the best, though), and then having been a substitute teacher in the public school system

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<sup>8</sup> Ted Doering and Chelsea Doering, *Myth of the Millennial* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 22.

of Madison, Wisconsin. As a student, I got a first-hand glimpse of how the public school teachers are being taught to think and to educate. As we identify general characteristics of millennials and the current worldview, I can see just how teachers are led to buy into it, and how it is then handed down to students. So much of the worldview of our culture starts with what is being taught in schools.

### Portrait of a Millennial

So what are the common characteristics of a millennial? Well, as was mentioned, millennials are simply those persons born over a roughly twenty-year period between the early 1980s and early 2000s. They are often characterized by numerous stereotypes, many of them positive, others that seem to indicate that when the world ends it will be because millennials couldn't look up from their phones. I've even heard of a Chrome extension that changes the word "millennials" to "snake people" whenever it appears.<sup>9</sup>

In the Doering book, they sketch "Millennial Molly,"<sup>10</sup> creating a composite picture of the different stereotypes associated with millennials. I could sketch you a picture of Millennial Mike. He is twenty-five years old and grew up in an absent family. He generally distrusts authority figures, and any institution. He's been burned by the church, by government and life in general. Mike thinks the church is just out for his money, and stands in the way of any and all progress that our society tries to make. He sees it as irrelevant, detached from reality, and self-serving. He lives in his parents' basement, and spends most of his time playing video games or recycling.

The majority of millennials tend to be Democratic in their political views, and tend to lean toward the social platform of the Democratic party. Half of millennials (50%) identify as Democrats or say they lean toward the Democratic Party, sixteen points greater than the percentage who identify or say they lean Republican (34%).<sup>11</sup> They tend to be supportive of same-sex marriage, as well as a woman's right to an abortion. They do not like the church being involved in politics and tend to list this as a "turn-off." In almost every study conducted, young

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<sup>9</sup> Slate, accessed September 5, 2018, [http://www.slate.com/blogs/future\\_tense/2015/05/26/this\\_chrome\\_extension\\_replaces\\_the\\_word\\_millennials\\_with\\_snake\\_people.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2015/05/26/this_chrome_extension_replaces_the_word_millennials_with_snake_people.html).

<sup>10</sup> Doering and Doering, 23.

<sup>11</sup> Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends," last modified March 7, 2014, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/>.

Americans cite the entanglement of church and state as a reason for disinterest in faith organizations.

Finally, the millennial is defined by technology. They are often referred to as “digital natives” because they grew up in the midst of the technology boom. It is during their lifespan that the transition was made between analog and digital. The quintessential portrait of a millennial is that he or she is hooked to their iPhone. This stereotype is not without reason as 96% of millennials reported having a cell phone in 2013.<sup>12</sup> Eighty-three percent reportedly sleep with their cell phones.<sup>13</sup> Technology heavily influences the ways that they learn and where they go for information. For instance, although 57% of Americans still get their news by watching it on television, almost four in ten (38%) millennials get it online.<sup>14</sup>

There’s a good chance Mike comes from a broken home. Millennials are *eight times* more likely to have come into this world without married parents than were Boomers.<sup>15</sup> This has led to a generation of skeptics. Skeptical of marriage, the church, and really any institution. At the same time, Mike is hopeful. He is hopeful that he and his generation can make a big difference in the world. Mike loves diversity and loves to travel. Millennials love diversity because they *are* diverse. According to Nielsen research, 19% are Hispanic, 14% African-American and 5% Asian. They are surpassed only by GenZ. Thirty-eight percent of millennials report being bilingual.<sup>16</sup> They would like this diversity reflected in the church. Millennials do not want worship to be the most segregated hour in America.

Along with that diversity, is a stress among the generation for “tolerance,” whether in the area of racism, sexism, gender preference, or sexual orientation. The majority of my experiences in the University of Wisconsin–Madison School of Education included classes in which knowledge was not taught so much as self-reflection. Classes were often

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<sup>12</sup> Siebert Lutheran Foundation, “Engaging Millennials in Ministry,” Siebert Lutheran Foundation, last modified 2015, [www.siebertfoundation.org/engagingmillennials](http://www.siebertfoundation.org/engagingmillennials).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Pew Research Center: Journalism & Media, “The Modern News Consumer,” accessed September 15, 2018, <http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/pathways-to-news/>.

<sup>15</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church . . . And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 46.

<sup>16</sup> MarketingCharts, “Demographic Stats about US Millennials,” MarketingCharts, accessed September 14, 2018, <https://www.marketingcharts.com/demographics-and-audiences-40016>.

not so much in the lecture format, as they were discussion groups for how we promote diversity and “tolerance” in our public schools, creating a safe space for all students. The emphasis on validating students’ feelings far overrode any emphasis on teaching objective truth.

You can see how this has led to the culture in which we live. As David Thompson writes,

When a group, such as a school or a major or a business or a nation or a church body or a religion, says it promotes diversity or multiculturalism or tolerance or objectivity, it typically means that all beliefs, cultures, religions, lifestyles are not only to be considered equal but also respected. This is the nose of the postmodern camel; once that nose is in the door of the tent, it’s almost impossible to keep out the entire beast.<sup>17</sup>

When our public schools as well as mainstream media are emphasizing not absolute truth but feelings, understanding, and “tolerance,” there is an obvious effect on the culture. According to a majority of US adults (57%), knowing what is right and wrong is a matter of personal experience.<sup>18</sup> Looking at the millennial generation, though, it is especially prevalent. Barna reports that three-quarters of millennials (74%) agree strongly or somewhat with the statement, “Whatever is right for your life or works best for you is the only truth you can know,” compared to only 39% of Elders.<sup>19</sup> And millennials (31%) are three times more likely than Elders (10%) and twice as likely as Boomers (16%) and Gen-Xers (16%) to *strongly* agree with the statement. One troubling statistic that especially demonstrates this shifting morality in the younger generation is that only 32% say viewing porn is “usually or always wrong,” compared to 56% who say not recycling is “usually or always wrong.”<sup>20</sup> Not recycling is seen as more immoral than porn usage! The often postmodern thinking of millennials is clear.

So now you know what a millennial is? Not even close. These are some stereotypical characteristics that may apply to millennials more than other generations and may be somewhat helpful in understanding this generation. However, we must understand that millennials are diverse. There is no “one size fits all.” As explained in the findings of

<sup>17</sup> David Thompson, *What in the World Is Going On?* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2011), 52.

<sup>18</sup> Barna, 50.

<sup>19</sup> Barna defines Elders as those born prior to 1946.

<sup>20</sup> Barna Group, “The Porn Phenomenon,” accessed September 15, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/the-porn-phenomenon/>.

the Siebert Foundation study, “There is no single Millennial generation mindset or one-dimensional framework for predicting their behaviors, attitudes, or belief systems. This is particularly true for a concept as sensitive and transitory as religion.”<sup>21</sup> Remember, the whole purpose of generation labels and generational research was originally so we could characterize a target consumer and know how to best market to him. But to say that one millennial is the same as the next would be a grave error. Millennials are unique individuals, and that is good news to us. Because “we are not trying to save people with sociology or marketing. Jesus is saving people with His Church.”<sup>22</sup>

### Rise of the *Nones*

Regarding religious views, there is great diversity in the millennial generation, but one significant trend that coincides with this generation’s lifespan is the “rise of the *nones*.” *Nones* are defined as those Americans who say they don’t identify with any religion. They are the nation’s fastest-growing and second-largest religious category, eclipsed only by Catholics, outnumbering even Southern Baptists, the largest Protestant denomination.<sup>23</sup> In the 1940s, only 5% of America’s population claimed no religious identity. By 1990 this had climbed a mere three percentage points to 8% of the population. Since then the rise has been exponential. In 2008 a full 15% declared themselves to be unaffiliated with any religion. Just four years later (2012), this had climbed to nearly 20%.<sup>24</sup>

Thirty-five percent of the millennial generation identify as *nones*. Obviously not every millennial is a *none*; 65% are not. Having said that, the rise of such apathy toward Christianity is certainly worth consideration. It is also worthwhile considering what has caused this rise. Harvard professor Robert Putnam writes about the setting for this rise:

It begins to jump at around 1990.... These were the kids who were coming of age in the America of the culture wars, in the America in which religion publicly became associated with a particular brand of politics, and so I think the single most important reason for the rise of the unknowns is that combination of the younger people moving

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<sup>21</sup> Siebert Lutheran Foundation, “Engaging Millennials in Ministry,” Siebert Lutheran Foundation, last modified 2015, [www.siebertfoundation.org/engagingmillennials](http://www.siebertfoundation.org/engagingmillennials).

<sup>22</sup> Doering and Doering, 194.

<sup>23</sup> James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 17.

<sup>24</sup> White, 16.

to the left on social issues, and the most visible religious leaders moving to the right on that same issue.<sup>25</sup>

James Emery White identifies the three major cultural currents affecting America in the past 40 years as being secularization, pluralization, and privatization.<sup>26</sup>

### *Secularization*

Many of us grew up in an America where Christianity was the dominant cultural faith. Judeo-Christian values were assumed in schools and in culture, and they underlay the media's portrayals of life and their evaluations of what was good and bad, right and wrong. Just twenty years ago, while a freshman at Marquette University, I wrote and presented a paper on why same-sex marriage should remain illegal. It was actually a suggested paper topic for the Intro to Law course I was taking. So much has changed in the twenty years since. I can hardly imagine we are even able to debate such things at most public or Jesuit universities today. Judeo-Christian values are hardly the dominant grid shaping people's thoughts and behaviors like they were in the past.

The positive side to this is that much of Christianity in the past was mere conformity to societal norms and expectations handed down by parents. Outward traditions do not make a Christian. As Jesus says, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."<sup>27</sup> The negative side is that the church has no inherent pull like it did in the past. Instead our culture has seen the elevation of "man" as the ultimate source of truth and knowledge. As C. S. Lewis wrote, "Almost all our modern philosophies have been devised to convince us that the good of man is to be found on this earth."<sup>28</sup>

### *Pluralization*

The second cultural current which has mobilized the rise of the *nones* is pluralization. This current reflects the reality that the world and nation in which we live is much more diverse than the one in which we

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<sup>25</sup> Putnam, Robert, quoted in Heidi Glenn, "Losing Our Religion: The Growth of the 'Nones,'" National Public Radio, January 13, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2013/01/14/169164840/losing-our-religion-the-growth-of-the-nones>.

<sup>26</sup> White, 49–50.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew 15:8–9.

<sup>28</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, rev. and exp. ed. (New York: Collier/Macmillan, 1980), 7.



grew up. America is the “melting pot” and new diversity is introduced every day. We are not just discussing racial diversity, but religious as well. We live in a world that claims there is no one correct religion, road to heaven, or way of life. There is a great plurality of them and none is greater or lesser than any other. This is the predominant view among millennials, as it is among the culture in which we live. I’ve had numerous members (millennial and non-millennial) tell me that it is good for their children to receive training in, not only our denomination, but in others as well. The idea seems to be that every denomination of Christianity is but one part of the whole. Nobody has it all figured out (and with so many denominations we can see how people might say that). The same idea could be applied to religions. I remember my cooperating teacher at the Madison high school where I student taught telling me that Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are all just different versions of the same religion.

### *Privatization*

If there is such a great plurality of religions, none is better than the next and we must tolerate and respect them all, then it is a private and personal matter, and public discussions are not necessary and perhaps even inappropriate. Privatization is the idea that religion is fine to hold, provided that it does not affect society and that you keep it to yourself, especially Christianity. “While we may not be turning into atheists, we seem quite content to accept the idea of faith being privately engaging but culturally irrelevant.”<sup>29</sup> I would have to confess that as I attended my liberal (but great) Big Ten university, it was all too easy to privatize my faith for fear of losing friends or status. I learned very well how to speak in such a way so as not to offend others, which to an extent is a good thing. As ministers of the Gospel, we do not run around like bulls in a china shop. On the other hand, the privatization of the Christian faith is not a good thing. It flies in the face of the Great Commission, to “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>30</sup>

This is the culture of the *nones*. Not all millennials are *nones*, and not all *nones* are millennials. However, millennials are driving the growth of the *nones*.<sup>31</sup> Like all generations, the millennial generation is the

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<sup>29</sup> White, 47.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew 28:19.

<sup>31</sup> Accessed July 25, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12/millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/>.



product of the philosophical movement of the late twentieth century and they see the church as antithetical to that movement, as well as to their own values. As Thompson and Thompson put it, “Church is no longer viewed as a center for community life or place of membership, largely because most Millennials and GenZ believe religious organizations are antithetical to their values with which they desire to raise their children.” They see the church community as exclusive in an increasingly inclusive world (and so internally rather than externally focused), out of touch with culture (e.g., in regards to sexuality, science, and social problems), and antagonistic to doubt and overprotective of dogma.<sup>32</sup>

### Millennials and the Church

Some of you may remember a YouTube video that came out a few years ago entitled “Why I Hate Religion, but Love Jesus.” It was a poem, written and recorded by Jefferson Bethke that went viral. To date it has more than 33.1 million views. It really struck a chord with the millennial generation as he seemed to set up Jesus and the Church as opposing forces. The main thrust of the poem is basically that Jesus and religion are antithetical to each other.

Now in a Christian Post report, written around the same time, Bethke clarified that he loves the church and didn’t mean to demean it. He stated, “The Church is [God’s] vehicle to reach a lost world. A hospital for sinners. Saying you love Jesus but hate the Church, is like a fiancé saying he loves his future bride, but hates her kids.”<sup>33</sup> Basically, Bethke professed to loving the Church, but to redefining the Church as Pharisaism in his poem. Generational study leads us to the conclusion that the majority of millennials do not see the distinction; they see the Church *as* Pharisaism. And so they, in large part, see the Church as hypocritical and do not see the need, much less the benefit, for attending.

A typical millennial response (remembering that this is only a generalization) would be that of Tabitha. Tabitha relates, “I guess I would call myself a Christian.... My parents went to church sometimes, and they always told me that we were Christians. Now I don’t practice my faith that much, but if you had to label me, that’s probably where I’ll be.” When asked if she attends church on a regular basis, she replied,

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<sup>32</sup> Luke Thompson and Christine Thompson, *Community and Identity: A Discussion to Overcoming the Obstacles to Integrating Millennials and Generation Z into Our Churches* (presented at the Michigan District Missionaries’ Retreat, August 13–15, 2017), 4.

<sup>33</sup> Ravelle Mohammed, “Why I Hate Religion, But Love Jesus’ Viral Video Sparks Faith Debate,” *The Christian Post*, accessed September 20, 2018.

“Actually no ... I did attend church for several months about three years ago. But the more I got to know people in the church, the more I heard about infighting and fussing. That made me notice how negative church people and preachers are in general. You know, it seems like every time I read about a Christian leader, he’s telling people what he’s against. It just all seems so negative.”

She continues, “I’m a pretty spiritual person.... I pray to God. Sometimes I try to read the Bible, though it’s kind of hard to understand. But I’m just not too interested in organized religion. It seems like all those people talk about is what they don’t like and how everything’s screwed up. That’s not for me. Things are tough enough without having to put up with all that negativity.”<sup>34</sup>

This is the perspective on organized and institutional religion, specifically Christianity, for many millennials. They are fine with spirituality. As reported, only 27% of *nones* are atheist. But 30% of those who don’t attend church say it is because they can find God elsewhere.<sup>35</sup> They believe in God, they just don’t see the institution of the church as necessary for having a relationship with him. They do not see the need for church, and in many cases see it as a negative influence on our world. “Religion is thus viewed by many of the Millennials as just another divisive force in the world.... The Millennials are the mediating generation and, from the perspective of many, organized religion leads to negativity and conflict.”<sup>36</sup>

The perception of Church for the millennial generation covers a broad and diverse range of perspectives and feelings. Many feel that the Church is negative, irrelevant, and antithetical to mainstream culture and mores. According to Barna research, majorities of millennials who don’t go to church say they see Christians as judgmental (87%), hypocritical (85%), anti-homosexual (91%) and insensitive to others (70%).<sup>37</sup> In his book *You Lost Me*, Barna president David Kinnaman lists six broad reasons [twenty-somethings] offer for dropping out. They find the church to be overprotective, shallow, anti-science, repressive, exclusive, and doubtless.<sup>38</sup> A perceived overemphasis on money, politics

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<sup>34</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 171.

<sup>35</sup> Barna, *Barna Trends*, 158.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Barna Research Group, “What Millennials Want When They Visit Church,” accessed August 31, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/what-millennials-want-when-they-visit-church/>.

<sup>38</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 92.

and polemics are a huge “turn-off” to the millennial generation. As a result, millennials are not opposed to spirituality, but feel it can be found without the Church.

### **What Can We Do?**

We have exactly what millennials need. We have what everybody needs. We have the good news of the world’s savior Christ Jesus. We have been given the means of grace and through these means, faith is created, strengthened, and preserved. Preach the Gospel; administer the Sacraments. This is what we are called to do. It’s what we are trained to do. The millennial generation needs that just as much as every other generation. They are broken sinners like you and me; Christ died and rose for them, like he did for you and me.

Having said that, we remember the advice of Jesus: “Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”<sup>39</sup> Understanding this, we can be especially mindful of certain aspects of our ministries as we minister to the millennial generation, and there are certainly ways we can be more intentional in our emphases.

It should be noted that this paper does not cover every perspective or belief system among millennials today. This paper serves to simply identify some of the larger trends that we see among millennials. In addition, suggestions are given, both from research, as well as personal experience, for how we might engage them in our ministries.

### **Reclaiming the Ancient Church**

When I go on my every-member visits, I always share with them what I consider to be the model for the Christian Church as laid out in Acts 2:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And

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<sup>39</sup> Matthew 10:16.

the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.<sup>40</sup>

I always break it down into three aspects of ministry that we strive after as a church: study, community, and service to those around us. This model seems, in general, to be just what millennials want to see in the Church.

## **Authenticity**

As we consider the Acts 2 description of the Early Church, we see the authenticity that seemed to define the first Christians. They talked the talk; they walked the walk. This is what millennials most want to see in the Church today as well. As the research was conducted for this paper, it was the single most common theme and suggestion for reaching millennials that emerged.

The millennial generation can spot a marketing scheme a mile away. They've been marketed to their whole lives. That's their concern with institutions: institutions just want to sell them something to make a quick buck. Their concern with the church is similar. Millennials feel like the church is only interested in butts, bucks, and buildings. If they think that our only concern is boosting attendance figures or putting a little more money in the coffers, they will want nothing to do with us.

## *Agenda*

Certainly we agree with them! It can be so easy to fall into the trap of focusing on the attendance figures, or membership figures, or synodical statistics and becoming either proud or discouraged. But if we are focused solely on increasing our stats, we have lost sight of our mission as a church. We know that this is not what we are after. We just want to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, just like the only agenda for the early Christian Church was to share the Gospel of salvation. Our "agenda" is not numbers or statistics. Our agenda is reaching them with the Gospel of full and free salvation in Christ. Be intentional in doing that. We want to be very careful that we don't give the impression that we have any ulterior motives in reaching out to them. Show them that they matter and that you care. When we do that, we are being authentic.

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<sup>40</sup> Acts 2:42-47.

### *Life and Ministry*

Be authentic, also, in your ministry and in your lives. “Authenticity is more important to Millennials than excellence. They would rather connect to a worship community led by someone who is living an authentic life than one that is perfect in its worship form.”<sup>41</sup> According to Barna research, 66% of millennials perceive the church to be hypocritical.<sup>42</sup> They see the church saying one thing and living another. This is a “turn-off” for all people, but maybe especially the millennial generation. Pastor James Hein writes, “Millennials are so skeptical, and sniff out hypocrisy so readily, that they will adamantly reject any love and forgiveness *talk* that isn’t genuinely reinforced by a selfless, serving *walk*.”<sup>43</sup>

We look at the early Christian church, and they were not only meeting together daily in the temple courts, they were also selling their possessions and giving to anyone as he had need. Millennials have a reputation as being altruistic and concerned about care for others. They are disappointed that they do not see the church doing more to serve the community or those in need. May God grant us grace to not only talk the talk, but walk the walk in our ministries.

### *Show Depth*

According to Barna research, 31% of millennials who say church is not important cite their perception that “church is boring.”<sup>44</sup> Barna president David Kinnaman writes, “Easy platitudes, proof texting, and formulaic slogans have anesthetized many young adults, leaving them with no idea of the gravity and power of following Christ.”<sup>45</sup> Part of being authentic is not being afraid to go into depth with our members. The early Christians were devoting themselves to the Apostles’ teaching; I guarantee they were going in depth in their studies. Rainer and Rainer write,

Go deep in biblical teaching. Millennial Christians are seeking to move as close to New Testament Christianity as possible. They have

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<sup>41</sup> Siebert Foundation, 13.

<sup>42</sup> Barna Research Group, “What Millennials Want When They Visit Church.”

<sup>43</sup> James Hein, “Ministering to Millennials (Part V - Recommendations regarding Sex, Learning Style, Service, and Tolerance),” accessed March 8, 2018, <http://www.breadforbeggars.com/ministering-to-millennials-part-v-my-recommendations-regarding-sex-learning-style-service-and-tolerance/>.

<sup>44</sup> Barna Research Group, “What Millennials Want When They Visit Church.”

<sup>45</sup> Kinnaman, 92.

a deep hunger to learn more about Scripture. They understand that they are a relatively small minority in their generation, and they want to be unwavering about their beliefs and convictions. Diluted doctrine and anemic biblical teaching and preaching are huge turn-offs for most Millennial Christians.<sup>46</sup>

Along with going in-depth, we want to share just how dramatic the Gospel is, and just how dramatic of an effect it has in our lives. Hein makes the point:

Christianity spread in the Roman Empire because the Holy Spirit was not only working through gospel proclamation, but also because the Spirit was attracting people to that message by having gospel effects in the day-to-day lives of the early Christians.<sup>47</sup>

We are not going to give testimonials, but millennials want to know that Christianity makes a difference in our lives. They want to see and hear it.

They also want to know that we are real people and that faith isn't just some point of pride that we lord over them. They want to see some common ground between us and them. Kinnaman writes,

Young Christians (and former Christians too) say the church is not a place that allows them to express doubts. They do not feel safe admitting that faith doesn't always make sense. In addition, many feel that the church's response to doubt is trivial and fact-focused, as if people can be talked out of doubting.<sup>48</sup>

This is also an issue that can be dealt with by authenticity. We want to be humble and honest in the fact that there are Scriptural truths that we might sometimes wrestle with. We can be honest about doubts with which we have dealt. The worst thing would be to look down on millennials (or anyone) simply because they are not yet at a certain level of faith or sanctification. Authenticity includes going in-depth, showing the dramatic difference this makes, and being honest about our own struggles in issues of faith and life.

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<sup>46</sup> Rainer and Rainer, 262.

<sup>47</sup> James Hein, "Ministering to Millennials (Part VI - My Recommendations regarding Social Renovation, Drama, Apologetics, and Change)," accessed March 8, 2018, <http://www.breadforbeggars.com/ministering-to-millennials-part-vi-my-recommendations-regarding-social-renovation-drama-apologetics-and-change/>.

<sup>48</sup> Kinnaman, 92.

### *Connect Faith to Life*

Thirty-five percent of millennials who say church attendance is not important cite, "It's not relevant to me."<sup>49</sup> They see us as just a club of like-minded people who meet on Sunday mornings and that's about it. We, of course, know that Christianity is not just a club, it's a way of life. The early Christian Church was a community. They met together, ate together, and prayed together. We, too, want our churches to be communities. We do well to meet together more than once a week.

We also want our congregations involved in the communities which surround us. Millennials see the Church as fostering passivity. After church on Sunday, they see Christians returning to their lives as if nothing has changed. They see the Church as long on words and short on action. They see the Church as self-serving, desiring only those butts, bucks, and buildings. Millennials know this is not what Church should be about. They are often biblically illiterate, but they do know that Jesus wasn't *just* preaching and teaching during his three years of ministry. He was also helping, healing, and feeding. They know that the early Christian Church "gave to everyone as he had need." They very much want that spirit of the New Testament Church and they don't see that among our churches today. "Millennials value causes, and so have brought a rise in movements: mindfulness, minimalism, shop local, environmentalism, etc. They see their purposes in life defined by serving others, giving back, and social engagement."<sup>50</sup> How can we, as congregations, better serve our communities and the world around us?

It is worth noting that millennials are often inconsistent in their involvement in organizations and institutions, especially as they first become involved. This poses a challenge for us as pastors and congregations in starting up service projects and other endeavors with inconsistent support and involvement. Nevertheless, we cannot give up striving for this goal. It is what the early Christian Church looked like; it is what we aim for today as well.

How can we do a better job of serving the communities around us in visible ways? One suggestion that was given me (by a millennial) for our women's mission rallies was to actively work to serve others rather than just listening to speakers and holding a business meeting. Not that those two things are bad or should be cut from the rallies, but there is a great desire among millennials to be more active in our Christian service, rather than passive. Putting money in the offering plates, giving

<sup>49</sup> Barna, *Barna Trends 2017*, 159.

<sup>50</sup> Thompson, 8.

it to an institution, is not seen by many as the best way we can serve in love and in some cases it reinforces the notion that the Church just wants money. How can we better serve in love?

One wonderful resource we have found is Kingdom Workers. Kingdom Workers provides opportunities to go to mission fields, to serve the disadvantaged, and to show our love in tangible ways. What else can we do? When I attended UW-Madison, I had the opportunity to attend and be involved with Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel and Student Center, which serves as the WELS Campus Ministry for the university. The church was constantly providing service opportunities. Some were as simple as setting up a table on the sidewalk and handing out lemonade to students during exam week. Others were simple service projects such as stocking local food pantries. I'm not saying we need to embrace social gospel and turn our churches into centers for fighting injustice. But we look at the life of Jesus, and what *was* he doing? Helping, healing, feeding. He was perfectly weaving loving service for his neighbor into his ministry. Are we doing the same? What can we do to better model our ministries after his?

### *Vocation*

Researcher David Kinnaman writes,

For me, the most heartbreaking aspect of our findings is the utter lack of clarity that many young people have regarding what God is asking them to do with their lives. It is a modern tragedy. Despite years of church-based experiences and countless hours of Bible-centered teaching, millions of next generation Christians have no idea that their faith connects to their life's work.<sup>51</sup>

Millennials, as they search for identity, as they strive to make a big difference in this world, need to be learning what the Bible says about Christian Vocation. Martin Luther spoke and wrote often about the doctrine of Christian Vocation.

Wherever there is such faith and assurance of grace in Christ, you can also confidently conclude with regard to your vocation and works that these are pleasing to God and are true and good Christian fruits. Furthermore, such temporal and physical works as governing a land and people, managing a house, rearing and

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<sup>51</sup> Kinnaman, 207.



teaching children, serving, toiling, etc., also develop into fruit that endures unto life everlasting.<sup>52</sup>

My hope and prayer is that we continue this emphasis in our churches today. It is of vital importance because, first of all, vocation is a teaching of Scripture and an emphasis of Lutheranism.

The doctrine of vocation is especially important to the millennial generation. Millennials are confident, optimistic, and feel they can make a huge difference in the world. This is great news and a great opportunity to share with them the eternal hope we have in Christ. At the same time, these high hopes can also lead to discouragement and disappointment when their goals are not achieved and they do not find the success they expect of themselves. An emphasis on Christian vocation will go a long way in learning that their true identity is found in Christ. President Wendland of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary writes,

Millennials need not seek significance only in jobs and activities that appear to all the world to be dramatically transforming and impactful. Significance is rather found by expressing Christian love in all the various callings in life, and in exercising faith despite all crosses and troubles and discouragements which arise in such service. To help them see the world as “full of God” and meet Christ on every street—that must be our goal.<sup>53</sup>

How can we better achieve this goal? May vocation retain a prominent place in our preaching, teaching (catechism, Bible Study, etc.), and conversations.

### Reach the Families

Although many millennials come from broken families, they do have a great love for their families. In reaching them, it is then vitally important that we reach *their families*. Rainer and Rainer mention that nearly nine out of ten (88%) say their parents had a positive influence on them.<sup>54</sup> Sixty-one percent of millennials stated family was really

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<sup>52</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Brown (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Publishing House, 1955–), 24:220.

<sup>53</sup> Paul O. Wendland, *Postmodernism and the Millennial Worldview* (paper presented at the Nebraska Missionary's Conference, January 26–27, 2016).

<sup>54</sup> Rainer and Rainer, 19.

important in life.<sup>55</sup> “Seventy-seven percent of millennials agreed that they seek their parent or parents’ advice on a regular basis.”<sup>56</sup>

Research by the Siebert Foundation reports:

According to longitudinal research on religious engagement conducted by Notre Dame researcher Christian Smith, Millennials most likely to engage in religion have grown up with an established faith tradition in their households. Parents not only encouraged and modeled church attendance but they also created “wrap around” religious touchpoints in their children’s lives.<sup>57</sup>

He goes on to additionally say that of those who have left the church (i.e., *nones*) these are the millennials who are most primed for a return later in life. All this to say that we must get families involved. Parents play such a crucial role in mentoring their children, and grandparents do the same for their grandchildren.

The fact that millennials, though often coming from broken homes, have a great love for family extends also to their roles as parents. We want to be reaching out to their parents and grandparents, and also to their children as well. The better we reach families, the better we reach millennials. As we reach out to the millennial generation, we want to make sure we are still reaching out to *all* generations.

## Apologetics

Our synod has recently begun an apologetics push. How does apologetics factor into our dialogue with millennials? Some have suggested a complete switch from traditional apologetics to an apologetical response to the question of “Why does it matter?” There is some credence to this, but since one of the millennial generation’s “turn-offs” to the church is that they see the church as anti-science, I would say that traditional apologetics are still important. One area that maybe needs special emphasis in our apologetical approach is the historical reliability of the New Testament. Barna research finds that among skeptics, two-thirds contend that the Bible is simply a book of well-known stories and advice, written by humans and containing the same degree of authority and wisdom as any other self-help book.<sup>58</sup> As this is the case, we must make the case for the veracity of Scripture.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>57</sup> Siebert Foundation, 16.

<sup>58</sup> Barna, *Barna Trends*, 183.

But we must also expand our apologetical approach to answering the question of why Christianity and the Church is important. The secularization of culture has led to a search for meaning. For those that just don't care, and many millennials don't, the case for importance must be made. One suggestion by Thompson and Thompson is to focus on Solomon's argument that life is meaningless. He writes,

A metanarrative than includes God, creatures that exist eternally, and a way to be with God eternally infuses our universe with meaning and value. Without God, though, although we can call certain aspects of our life meaningful (short-term), we cannot call life in general meaningful. No God means no human nature, no objective morality, and so no objectively right way to live.<sup>59</sup>

A proper apologetic approach to the millennial generation would then include an explanation of the "meaninglessness of life" without God, without the news of salvation in Christ. At the same time, we emphasize how a proper understanding of Scripture fills our lives with meaning and hope. James Hein recommends incorporating apologetics into our catechism curriculum.<sup>60</sup> Organizations such as Answers in Genesis also provide wonderful resources. How else can we incorporate apologetics into our ministries?

### **Emphasize Inclusivity**

As has been mentioned, substantial majorities of millennials who don't go to church say they see Christians as judgmental (87%), hypocritical (85%), anti-homosexual (91%), and insensitive to others (70%).<sup>61</sup> What the respondents are referring to is the Church's perceived propensity to condemn culture vehemently.

Now we must hold to God's Word when it comes to issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion. We cannot even begin to compromise. However, we also want to make sure we are not holding these issues out as our central emphasis as a church. Our central emphasis has always been and must remain salvation by grace alone, through faith alone. Our emphasis must always be that salvation is for all people, not just Norwegians, and not just those raised in Christian homes. Adjustments in how we talk about, promote, and share our congregations may be

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<sup>59</sup> Thompson and Thompson, 16.

<sup>60</sup> Hein, "Ministering to Millennials (Part VI ).

<sup>61</sup> Barna, "What Millennials Want When They Visit Church," accessed August 31, 2018, [www.barna.com/research/what-millennials-want-when-they-visit-church/](http://www.barna.com/research/what-millennials-want-when-they-visit-church/).

beneficial. Use discretion in using polemics. Use discretion in discussing politics.

We want to use discretion, as well, in discussing fellowship. I am guessing that the majority of us here at this conference have run up against members who do not understand or do not like what we teach regarding fellowship. Now we cannot compromise Scripture in any way. But we can use discretion when we do our best to address the issue, sensitive to the fact that so many of our members, and of this generation, struggle with understanding it. And let us emphasize the positive aspect of fellowship, because it is a beautiful doctrine as we see the beautiful full unity that we enjoy with our brothers and sisters within our confession. Let us emphasize this.

We can also emphasize the universal justification won by Jesus Christ. The above statistics (regarding millennials' perception of the Church as divisive and negative) generally reflect caricatures of Scripture and the Church that are held by the unbelieving world. While Scripture teaches Christ as the exclusive way to heaven, and Scripture itself as exclusively the source of all religious truth, we know that Christ lived, died, and rose again for *all* people. Make this your emphasis.

Take opportunities to showcase the work of the ELS Board for World Outreach. Make sure your members know that we are a synod, but we are also a member synod of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, a *worldwide* conference of churches that includes twenty-two member churches and ten associate member churches.

## Regarding Worship Styles

Worship style is not the greatest concern to millennials when attending a church, though they do not like worship wars.<sup>62</sup> The Siebert Foundation reports, “What the church typically thinks of as primary attractions for Millennials—contemporary worship styles, hipster fashion, coffee houses, and social media—are only compelling in the context of authentic relationship and leaders living authentic lives.”<sup>63</sup> Forty-one percent of millennial Christians describe a desire for “a more traditional faith, rather than a hip version of Christianity.”<sup>64</sup>

Some studies indicate that they are “drawn to more traditional and ancient forms of worship, which symbolize a connection to something

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<sup>62</sup> Thom S. Rainer, “Ten Ways Millennials Are Shaping Local Congregations Today,” accessed September 20, 2018, <http://thomrainer.com/2014/08/13/ten-ways-millennials-shaping-local-congregations-today/>.

<sup>63</sup> Siebert Foundation, 5.

<sup>64</sup> Kinnaman, 27.

bigger than themselves.”<sup>65</sup> This bodes well for us as a liturgical synod. Although there may be some who prefer contemporary worship (and there are), it is still a large percentage that are drawn to our historical liturgical worship.

Having said that, millennials do not want hollow tradition, or form just for the sake of form. The studies speak of the importance of explaining and talking about the meaning of faith practices, particularly for those who have not grown up in a faith tradition.<sup>66</sup> Especially as we connect with new people, we need to be ready to teach them the importance of what is second nature to us. With the strong Lutheran emphasis on teaching, this should be part and parcel to our ministries.

### Communication & Technology

Technology is no silver bullet. In the Siebert study *Engaging Millennials in Ministry*, we find the following quotation:

We expected that technology would play a central role in Millennial ministries. However, for many of the ministry leaders we spoke to, technology is not the main focus, and some cautioned that too much focus on the latest technology would be a distraction from the relational emphasis of their ministries. Some ministries, like Pulse Outreach, which does large evangelistic outreaches, use text messaging as an integral part of their follow-up process. Most, however, focus on personal, offline relationship building strategies as the central focus of their ministry.<sup>67</sup>

Having said that, we certainly can and want to make use of the communication means available to us today just as Luther and his fellow reformers’ made use of the printing press to make it more accessible to those around them. We, too, strive to make the message of Scripture more accessible to those around us. The use of technology shows that we care about the current generations because it shows that we are trying to reach them. When we avoid it, knowing that it’s their primary form of media, what are we saying about our desire to connect with them and share the Good News with them?

It is important to remember that millennials are less likely than previous generations to have brand, organizational, political, or religious loyalty. They often distrust authority and all things institutional. What

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<sup>65</sup> Siebert Foundation, 21.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

that means practically is that they are more likely to check out an organization online than in person. It seems, then, that having a high-quality website and using social media (such as Facebook) are great channels for our communications.

As we use technology, we also do well to communicate with pictures, rather than text. Millennials and GenZ differ from previous generations in their dependence on the internet, on visual presentation of information, and on web-based social media applications and networks. They gravitate towards photos and videos of real members, real stories, real causes, and real change. Visuals ought to predominate communication rather than text.<sup>68</sup> Live-streaming is a great option if you are able to make use of it. Posting videos online and embedding them into our websites are great ways to reach the millennial generation. The younger generations will watch more videos than they will read all your print material. Don't have that skill set? There is probably a millennial in your congregation that does. It would be a wonderful way to involve them in your ministry.

### **Conclusion:**

As we begin a new century of sharing the gospel as a synod, we remember that the world does change. Examples can be found in culture, in media, in language, just to name a few. To some extent, we are called to adapt to the world around us. As much as we may want to speak Biblical Hebrew and Koine Greek 24/7, we must accommodate ourselves to the world around us and speak English. In the same way, we must accommodate ourselves to the world in the ways we communicate Scripture. As the Apostle Paul writes,

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Thompson and Thompson, 6.

<sup>69</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:19–23.

Paul demonstrates his desire to “meet people where they’re at” in his Mars Hill sermon, where he begins with a discussion of the foreign idols he has encountered at the Areopagus, which leads into a presentation of the hope we have in our living Lord.

One of the challenges we face (as Paul did) is the changing cultural and generational landscape of the world in which we live. This paper is about facing that challenge, but it is also about an opportunity. As those who know the hope that we have in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, it is our joy and privilege to share the Gospel with those around us. As the psalmist says, “One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.”<sup>70</sup> The hope is that this paper serves to help us all serve the millennial generation better.

We do well to research the different generations we serve so that we might serve them the best that we can. But there is another way of considering generations. We are also members of our church generation. As a church generation, we are not defined by birth years, death years, cultural traits, or any other earthly factor. We are brothers and sisters in Christ, working together to share our Savior’s Word of hope with all those that surround us. As Doering and Doering write,

Churches would do well to connect millennials to communities within their congregations that mimic a family reunion: old people, young people, married people, single people, babies, and more, who meet together to eat and serve and study the Bible, but who also gather with the church at large every week for worship.<sup>71</sup>

So how do we minister to the millennial generation? We *Proclaim the Wonders God Has Done!* We preach the Gospel, and we administer Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. It is through the means of grace that faith is worked, strengthened, and preserved in the heart. We are authentic in our ministries and in our lives. We show the difference this hope makes in our lives! This hope is for all generations to whom we minister: Boomers, Gen X, millennials, Gen Z, and any others that might await us. “We Proclaim a Changeless Christ to a Changing World” as the tagline of my congregation states. May we do just that as we *Proclaim the Wonders God Has Done* to the millennial generation, and to all generations, for that is for whom Christ died and rose again! [LSQ](#)

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<sup>70</sup> Psalm 145:4.

<sup>71</sup> Doering and Doering, 133.



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# Pastoral Care and Christian Counseling: Role Differentiation and Partnership

Joshua Mears  
*Christian Family Solutions*

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**T**HE CARE OF SOULS WITHIN PASTORAL MINISTRY has many different tasks and duties. The specific task of pastoral counseling within the public ministry is the focus of this study. As a Christian psychologist, this paper will reflect on developments within our culture, the church, and the industry of psychology. It will also encourage collaboration and partnership in the overlapping delivery of Law and Gospel to souls that need care and counsel. Jesus himself the great and wonderful counselor encourages and motivates the troubled soul to “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28, ESV). This paper will not be a camouflaged marketing promotion for referrals for the services at Christian Family Solutions. Instead this study we will look to investigate and articulate the value of the role inherent within the public ministry as a counselor and how dependency on a “referral first” methodology of pastoral counseling may be flawed and unwise.

In the first course taken within my doctoral program in clinical psychology, the professor for the history and systems course (a broad course outlining the study of psychology with its roots in philosophy and religious systems) suggested that we as clinical psychology students should view our path of graduate studies within a paradigm of training to become *secular clergy*. The instructor indicated that her definition of clergy is a professional helper that the society looks to for answers and guidance during times of trial and tribulation. She went on to explain

that as future psychologists we will be leaned on by our clients to help them find answers in regards to confounding questions of hurt and suffering. This was in the years following the terrorist attacks on 9/11 and the increase in mass shootings. To be fair to this instructor, there were numerous examples of psychologists posing as secular clergy as they were being brought on to television programs to be asked deeply profound questions of how humans were capable of such depravity and how we as a culture were going to be able to find meaning and purpose after those tragedies. Within that opening monologue this instructor was laying the foundation for how the field of psychology has challenged and in my opinion successfully usurped much of the authoritative vocational real estate that the Christian Church and pastors have had for the care of humankind. "For centuries, soul care was done primarily, almost exclusively, by clergy. But in the past generation, at least in North America, other vocations claiming to do soul healing have greatly expanded" (Marrs, 2014).

Although pastoral counseling is the focus of this paper, we have to understand and review some of the other important vocations involved in this venture of counseling. Those areas may include titles such as biblical counselors, Christian counselors, or Christian psychologists. One might assume that these are all synonymous terms implying the same concepts, philosophies, and set of interventions. On one level, this assumption may be broadly accurate, but at a deeper and more nuanced level, each of these terms implies a different and distinct set of goals, strategies, and philosophies of change. To explain and provide background for the development of the professional field of Christian counseling, one must begin with a review of the study of integration.

## **Art of Integration**

In order to understand and articulate the overlapping nature of soul care between professional counseling and pastoral counseling, one must examine what theories of integration have been developed to help us understand how the Christian Faith and the discipline of psychology can, or if they even should, work cohesively. In this section we will begin to review the frameworks and conceptual explanatory systems that have been developed in order to help Christian Counselors be mindful and strategic for how to integrate Scripture and the Christian faith into their vocation as a trained mental health professionals. This review will be helpful for pastoral counseling not only in regards to helping you to be prepared to ask in-depth questions of your counselor referral sources

but also to consider how much and in what way you will glean information and insights in your own pastoral counseling endeavors.

The study of the integration of Christian beliefs (doctrine) and psychological theory has many different frameworks, but the main intention is to calculate a theory of how religion and psychology interact and potentially which study has higher value or precedence on human behavior change. Integration is usually stated in such generalized terms as the “interaction” or “reciprocal interaction” of psychology and theology or as the “discovery and articulation of the common underlying principles” of these two fields. Perhaps stated in another way the goal of integration is to come to a greater more unified and comprehensive understanding of human persons and their social world than is possible through any unitary disciplinary window alone.

Many may be wary of the study of integration at all, but it should be made clear that a sound integration theory does not and should not detract from the truths within theology. Some would even argue that perhaps a consistent and truthful integration framework could deepen those truths through a comprehensive cross-disciplinary application and unification of truth. This unified perspective enables us to celebrate the truths of Scripture, and to marvel and “praise [God], for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:4).

### *The “Against” Framework*

The first conceptual framework for integration theorists suggests that integration is not feasible. In this understanding either psychology rejects theology as a source of truth or theology rejects psychology as a source of truth and no integration is possible. Proponents of this system suggest that psychology is a religious system or worldview in and of itself, and therefore it must stand in contradiction to the Christian belief system. The term psychoheresy has been used to describe that all psychological theories and explanatory systems are heretical contradictions to a biblical worldview. A Christian counselor or pastoral counselor employing this framework accepts nothing but scripture as the basis for counseling. This was a common reaction by many in the church to the initial idea of utilizing psychological theory in integrative counseling and perhaps rightfully so as Freudian sexual drive theories and humanistic concepts of self-actualization were and are clearly antithetical to the core message of Scripture. This *Against* framework believes that psychology is always in conflict with biblical ideas. Using this framework one has to outright reject the discipline of psychology

as illegitimate and its methods as a competing influence for the souls of mankind. An important rationale for this *Against* framework is the underlying notion that the Bible is sufficient. If we do not rely on the Means of Grace to bring help and healing for maladjustment, then the argument goes that we do not believe in the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture. Some of the Scripture references that are used as proof texts against the integration of psychology include: John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," and 2 Timothy 3:16–17, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." Proponents of this model suggest that God's divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Jay Adams and his nouthetic counseling theory embodies much of this *Against* framework. He posits that the Bible is scientifically sufficient, and its content directly addresses all counseling matters. One of the strengths of this framework is that it takes the authority of Scripture very seriously. It does not attempt to minimize scriptural principles or reduce them in comparison to psychological principles. The emphasis on theological training regarding sin and its impact on mental health is also a very positive strength of this model.

However, for some the application of this *Against* framework can also create an unintended superficial focus on sin as a primary cause of all behavioral disturbances and distress in someone's life. This model encourages repentance as the primary source of healing and peace. In a macro sense, the fall of human nature within the original fall into sin did cause every major disturbance in God's perfect plan for his creation, and repentance is the true singular path to healing and restoration for all souls. However, there are instances when mental health concerns do not appear to be directly attributed to a volitional sinful behavior. An example would be the individual who has the genetic manifestation of a serious and persistent mental illness condition such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. Repentance and absolution are still fundamental answers to provide eternal healing and hope, but psychiatric care must be a part of the temporal treatment for these organic manifestations of mental illness.

### *Separate but Equal Framework*

Another integration model is the multilevel theory or *Separate but Equal* framework. This framework suggests that both disciplines (theology and psychology) are legitimate. It even concedes that there

are links in the underlying material, but this integration model does not attempt to modify or manipulate the theories from within their separate disciplines. This multilevel analytical approach suggests a non-manipulative form of integration. Within this integration model, the field of psychology is used when the domain or study calls for psychological tools. Conversely, when the domain is spiritual, then the field of theology is utilized. Lawrence J. Crabb (1975) referred to this as *Separate but Equal*, and he articulates that this framework suggests that the Bible is valid in the area in which it speaks, and psychology is considered valid in the area in which it speaks. The *Separate but Equal* counselor may switch back and forth between psychology and theology, but efforts are made to separate the two disciplines. This method gives strong support for empirical science and research. It also implies that secular psychology is always true because empirical evidence bears this out. The strongest weakness of this method is that it gives the science of psychology more certainty than it actually has earned. This framework also limits the ability for psychologists or counselors from a Christian worldview to have influence on psychological theories. One could argue that the only worldview that is allowed to be influential within this study is the secular worldview which maintains legitimacy in this empirically validated environment. Syncretism and heretical views fueled by changes in societal and cultural norms can also flow from this model when Christian clinicians apply this method without submitting to truth claims grounded in Scripture.

Everett Worthington (2010) uses a marriage dance metaphor to represent his understanding of the multilevel analysis framework. He describes how both parties (psychology and theology) have different roles and perspectives within that dance. He would argue that the lead in that dance (theology) can continue to guide the dance, but that these disciplines can remain separate and distinct entities where the dance symbolizes a harmony with both of these disciplines flowing together. This symbolism may have some value and can help with a sound integration understanding, but one could argue that this would still be a parallels system where Scripture appears to not be given sufficient authority because the disciplines are not assigned a definitive hierarchy.

### *Transformative Framework*

The next integration framework suggests a transformative approach. In this transformative pattern, either psychology reconstructs or transforms theology (e.g., eliminating the supernatural) or

theology reconstructs or transforms psychology (e.g., by eliminating the natural sciences). On one side of this transformative model, one could suggest that theology transforms psychology by filtering or altering the psychological theory or intervention based on a biblical worldview of understanding. Many descriptive metaphors have been developed to explain this transformative pattern. One is that of the “tossed salad” where like a salad bowl the variety of ingredients are thrown into the bowl and tossed about creating a mixture of all the ingredients from theological and spiritual sources. One potential oversight of the tossed salad approach is that psychological theories are often accepted uncritically and without an understanding of the conflicting worldviews (i.e., humanism, existentialism, modernism, etc.) which are often represented in psychology. Consequently, a number of unbiblical ideas may creep into this counseling.

A counselor within this model may begin to believe and appreciate the value of some theological principles or concepts but they do not accept all of the primary truths within a comprehensive biblical worldview. Examples of this can be seen where counselors will use terms such as forgiveness, grace, and redemption without an accurate and full doctrinal understanding of those terms. In this tossed salad framework, one could still elevate science and reduce the authority of Scripture. Proponents of this model would suggest that faith should not limit your appreciation and understanding of psychological principles and the discipline of counseling. Some of this can be seen where the supernatural aspects of religion or faith are filtered through a naturalism lens and the supernatural is rejected. This is a syncretistic view which leads to heretical views that do not stand up to scriptural truths.

Another transformative metaphor is the filtering model, which suggests that the truths of psychology are filtered through the view of Scripture, and we keep whatever remains so long as those methods do not contradict Christian beliefs. Larry Crabb (1975) is a prominent promoter of the filtering theory. This appears to be a sound framework for a Christian counselor who would like to maintain biblical purity while gleaning any non-contradictory psychological philosophies or strategies.

A variation of the filtering model is called “Spoiling the Egyptians” which suggests that the Christian counselor is first thoroughly grounded in the Word of God. However, just as God made provision for the Israelites which they carried out of Egypt, the Christian counselor analyzes the findings of modern psychology and takes the “spoils” or



tools that are consistent with a biblical perspective. This theory holds that the Word of God is absolute in authority, and the only truly and fully reliable source of knowledge. Psychology, on the other hand, is a field that attempts to use the scientific method to investigate a variety of man's problems and seeks to determine what works in helping people resolve their problems. This approach recognizes that Scripture is "ALL TRUTH," but may not contain "all truth." Knowledge exists beyond Scripture about many subjects including psychology, medicine, family life, etc. The Christian counselor operating from this approach takes what is useful and consistent with Scripture while discarding the rest.

Some final points of significance in regards to the proper use of integration models. Implicit within any sound integration work is the understanding that the use of reason/rational science, such as psychology, is revealed through natural law. Therefore, psychology should serve a ministerial influence on Word and the Sacraments because the Gospel itself has a magisterial change influence (LCMS, 2013). Concerns will arise when we make *magisterial use* of natural law (in this case psychology), and therefore allow it to stand over and above the Gospel and judge it based on argument and evidence. As Luther (1526) states in his *Lectures on Jonah*:

Let us here also learn from nature and from reason what can be known of God. It follows from this that natural reason must concede that all that is good comes from God; for He who can save from every need and misfortune is also able to grant all that is good and that makes for happiness. That is as far as the natural light of reason sheds its rays—it regards God as kind, gracious, merciful, and benevolent (Luther, 19:53–4).

The *ministerial use* of general revelation in natural law occurs when reason submits to and serves Scripture and the Gospel.

The doctrine of the two kingdoms is also very important in a sound integration model because one could suggest that a Christian counselor may not on the surface be overtly different from a secular clinician while operating in the kingdom of the left. We see this where a therapist is acting in accord with government regulations, licensing boards, and using reason and science effectively. Christian counselors acting as stewards within a two kingdoms mindset should be active in psychological research, clinical practice and philosophy but they can maintain their foundation in the kingdom of the right by submitting to Christian tradition and truth in Scripture. This two kingdoms doctrine allows



Christians in the field of psychology to be salt and light of the earth as we make contributions within the secular world in areas that promote and embrace truth and sound Christian ethics (Teigen, 2013).

### **State of Pastoral Office**

In an effort to assess the many different traits and developing patterns within the current state of pastoral ministry and how those changes might influence pastoral counseling, the Barna Study, *The State of Pastors* (2017), will be reviewed. This study, which collected over 10,000 surveys and individual interviews from pastors from 40 different denominations reveal many of the issues influencing current trends in pastoral ministry. Although clearly this cross-sectional study of many different denominations is not perfectly representative of ELS parishes, there are important pieces of this data that can be gleaned and utilized within our own synod.

One of the important and significant changes that has occurred within our culture is the prominence or importance that the institution of the church plays in the individual lives of the parishioners. Viewing the pastor as a credible and reliable source of knowledge and counsel is an important change that has occurred in our current times. When source credibility was assessed, the survey reveals that only 21% of the adult United States population believes that pastors are “very credible” when it comes to important issues of our day, and 11% of adults believe that ministers are “not at all” credible (Barna, 2017). This is consistent with other research studies (Edelman, 2018) which demonstrates a decline in the trust that the general populace has with traditional institutions such as government, media, higher education, and business.

As social and moral issues continue to evolve in a post-truth culture, pastors are finding a very difficult position in which they are finding themselves to have less and less of a position of authority to confess the truth to a fallen world. This was revealed when 44% of Protestant pastors stated that speaking out on moral and social issues is harder today than it was five years ago (Barna, 2017). A basic understanding of the changing nature of the current secular and postmodern worldview suggest this feeling of reluctance by pastors to boldly confess truth is due to the perception that the church is viewed as intolerant and not understanding of moral and political issues. This is perhaps most evident surrounding sexual ethics and the loss of the Bible as a cultural source of morality in areas of sexual orientation and gender identity. The concern or hesitation to speak out on social and moral issues is rooted in the

rejection of an inerrant Scripture as a reliable and normative guide for life. When younger millennial generations were polled on their view of Scripture, they reported less trust in the authority of Scripture (59%) when compared to older generations (80%) (Barna, 2017).

What does the research surrounding the pastoral office, its duties, and tasks tell us about the unique challenges and obstacles that pastors are presented with today? When surveyed about the most challenging aspect of being a pastor today the highest responses were *juggling the demands of the job* (14%), *competing for people's time* (14%) and *apathetic and uncommitted Christians* (14%). The idea of having an in-depth and nuanced relationship with the members of your flock is becoming more and more challenging as there is less and less time that members are making for their own spiritual growth. Finding time to arrange the requisite time needed for pastoral counseling sessions, adult instruction, and individual and personal ministry has certainly proved to be more and more complex for pastors.

Pastoral ministry can also be complicated with the understanding the pastors themselves are not immune to spiritual and emotional challenges. "Nearly half of Pastors (46%) report struggling with depression at some point in their tenure in the ministry" (Barna, 2017). Three out of ten pastors report feeling lonely more often than most adults and they are much less likely than the average adult to report that they never feel lonely (Barna, 2017). The difficult demands of the pastoral ministry and the presence of mental health concerns for pastors that are serving is also leading to increasing numbers of pastors that are resigning from the ministry. Seinkbeil (2019) suggests that,

the largest factor in the startling number of pastors who resign their calls or are driven from them by dysfunctional congregations is the loss of pastoral identity. Churches have forgotten what pastors are supposed to do, and we pastors just do not know who we are any more. And so we cast about looking for some role to play, like starving actors trying to land a job (p. 34).

In addition to depression, loneliness, burnout, and other stressors that may be linked to ministry stress, there is also the possibility that being in a position of authority within the church can create a distorted and unhealthy view of superiority. The Barna research suggests that 3 out of 10 pastors believe that their ideas are usually better than other people's. Similarly 3 out of 10 pastors feel threatened when others disagree with them on a topic close to their heart (Barna, 2017). To be

compassionate and effective in pastoral counseling, one needs to have the skills of being objective and balanced in how they deliver a clear and loving message of Law and Gospel. Furthermore, there is much research evidence that if pastors are able to manage their own emotional, personality, and mental health issues effectively that this can provide fodder for them to develop additional empathy and compassion, generating relational skills that otherwise would not have been cultivated.

The training and preparation that pastors complete within seminary is thorough in regards to doctrinal matters, original language training, and homiletics. This correlates with the research which shows that the most appreciated or favorite task within all ministry related activities reported by pastors is preaching and teaching (Barna, 2017). What about the area of pastoral counseling in regards to how satisfied and competent pastors feel when they are delivering counseling related interventions? When surveyed about the areas of ministry for which pastors wish they had been better prepared, the highest individual answer was “counseling/helping people with problems to solve” at 29% of the total survey (Barna, 2017). Schuetze (2017) also expresses a similar sentiment when he states, “They (*pastors*) carry out their ministry and counsel members even though they have little or no professional training in any field of counseling. They had a course or two on the seminary level and hopefully pursued some continuing education courses along the way” (p. 268). Perhaps consistent with this finding of a lack of feeling competent and well trained for counseling, when asked about the pastoral tasks they least appreciated, pastors reported; discipling others (8%), evangelizing (6%) and pastoral care (5%) as the lowest items for which they appreciated spending their ministry time.

In summary, the Barna survey, “The State of the Pastors,” suggests that there are unique challenges if not outright disadvantages for pastors in today’s culture as viable and credible sources of knowledge and counsel. Pastors also may feel overburdened in this area due to their own emotional and mental health struggles and an unbalanced manner in which they reflect and use the authority of Scripture without wielding an overly demanding and authoritative sense of superiority. Lastly, pastors may feel that they are inadequately trained in how to deliver effective counseling interventions.

### **Barriers to Effectiveness within Pastoral Counseling Relationships**

In this final section, we will further examine some areas that can develop into barriers to forming effective pastoral counseling

relationships and explore potential remedies to those situations. What should pastors do when they are attempting to form a working model or plan for how and when to work with parishioners that need counseling?

Pastors engaging in pastoral counseling are wise to use the tools of their trade and engage with the areas of which they have the most competency and training. Schuetze (2017) indicates that pastors “are very limited in their ability to address mental health problems and disorders. But they do have an extensive background in the study and application of Scripture. For this reason, a pastor should recognize his limitations and play to his strengths” (p. 269). This perspective could be misconstrued to align with a parallels framework of integration where the pastoral counselor is encouraged to treat only the areas that he is competent to treat. This may lead one to view the person as separate and distinct in their view of human nature with each area or fragmented portion of the self needing a separate physician. “If human nature can be divided into body, spirit, and soul, then we need the doctor to treat the body, the pastor to treat the spirit, and the psychologist to treat the soul” (McMinn & Philips, p. 54). The pastor is always competent to treat and provide care for the soul, and a referral for mental health care should not be justification for a lack of continued involvement and personal ministry.

A professional example will help illuminate this concern with a division of duties in the care of souls. While participating in a professional consultation group during my doctoral training program, there was a colleague who expressed frustration about a client’s insistence on knowing and hearing some basics about the clinician’s personal religious worldview and background. The client wanted to have some understanding of the ideological framework from which the counselor was applying counseling interventions prior to moving forward with the counseling work. There is much debate on the idea of counselors disclosing any personal information, and therefore the consultation group was emboldening the professional in training to restrain from any disclosures about their religious faith. The recommendation from the group was that if the client wanted spiritual counsel they needed to refer to clergy and therefore disclosing anything in that area was inappropriate. My contribution to this discussion was that the client does not view their counseling presenting problems within neat and well-defined demarcations. The depressed person cannot be treated for their depression by a mental health professional and then simply be handed

back over to the pastor for spiritual care. This is not a unified view of the integrated self.

A similar parallel can be made with individuals who are being treated for comorbid conditions such as alcoholism and depression. The field of psychology and addictions work has historically operated under a model of care that separated treatment for chemical health and mental health. However, with insights and clinical research, newer models of dual diagnosis have been developed which show that a client is not able to exclusively treat substance use by a licensed alcohol and drug counselor and then go on to be treated for other mental health concerns by a mental health professional. The evidence-based model of care suggests that individuals and their pathologies are complex and interrelated, and therefore one should use a multidisciplinary team that targets all areas of their functioning simultaneously. The same must apply to the counseling situations for spiritual and psychological care. We cannot use a divide and conquer theory because this is ineffective and not viewing the soul as an integrated unit. The pastor should continue to be a part of the counseling process even if a referral to a professional counselor is made.

The concept or idea that pastors should refer to a professional counselor who has training and expertise in the areas of mental health is not something that I intend to contest. And most certainly the avoidance of a referral, when it is clearly indicated, can cause harm, “Such actions pose harm to members because their problems either go untreated or are treated in an inappropriate and ineffective manner” (Schuetze, 2017, p. 274). The referral and collaboration process between pastors and professional counselors is something that I believe in and make my living from. However, I do believe that this referral process has become overly skewed to the over reliance on trained mental health professionals. With the burgeoning field of mental health and the ever-increasing number and variety of new mental health diagnoses, it can appear quite daunting for pastors to remain involved. However, it is imperative that pastors understand that in their public ministry they still have the duty and honor to provide the greatest counsel directly from the Gospel. Senkbeil (2019) better describes this when he writes:

Many were greatly helped by counseling from a licensed therapist. But no counselor could give the aid and comfort I was able to provide: as a called and ordained servant of Christ and by His authority to forgive them all their sins, to relieve their distress, to

deliver balm and comfort for their wounds in Christ's shed blood, to bless them with peace and consolation in the Name of the Holy Trinity. Before my own eyes I saw transformation begin as these men moved incrementally from grief to comfort, from fear to confidence, and then from despair to hope (p. 42).

An additional area of concern within this counseling collaboration and ministry partnership is that structural and operational problems abound in the areas of soul care. There is a lack of doctrinal oversight in the realm of professional counseling and a lack of professional oversight in the realm of pastoral counseling. Concerning the former, there are numerous components of professional management present within the psychology discipline such as requirements for degree coursework, clinical training, post-degree supervision, consultation and supervision requirements and ethical guidelines and standards. This is in addition to the oversight that managed care and public state regulations have on this field with auditing and reviewing treatment plans, progress notes, and clinical documentation. All of these measures of oversight help to ensure public safety for the delivery of proven and effective mental health treatment. However, there are very limited professional and operational mechanisms to ensure the quality of clinical counseling as applied to the area of integration of theological domains in the counseling field. "A hugely influential profession is operating by claiming title to the most intimate and weighty aspects of souls: In effect, functional authority over the souls of Christ's sheep is being granted to a semi-secular, unaccountable parapastorate. This invites trouble" (McMinn & Philips, 2010, p. 55). This doctrinal ineptitude can be seen with the wide variety of methods and philosophies employed by so-called "Christian Counselors." This has caused our agency, WLCFS, to create and formalize more systematic methods of candidate screening/recruitment, training, and ongoing professional development. These areas became necessary because of a lack of consistency with trained counselors even within the fellowship of ELS/WELS members who do not have consistent and adequate training on the integration of a Christian worldview and scriptural application of counseling methods.

Conversely, concerning pastors there is extensive training and scriptural-mandated requirements in regards to doctrinal knowledge/application, learning the original languages, and vicar training which are prerequisites for entering the public ministry. This appears to be a high standard for oversight of the public ministry. Some theological

seminaries appear to be adhering to a convenience model of quick and expedited training models with less requirements for original languages and online higher education delivery (Schmeling, 2018). However, there is very little in regards to professional oversight in the areas of pastoral counseling strategy and implantation once a pastor is officially in the pastoral office. “There is no institutional system—creedal, educational, credentialing or supervisory—to help him think as biblically about counseling as he does about preaching and evangelism. His views on counseling will be matters of opinion and conscience” (McMinn & Philips, p. 57). This lack of oversight creates many concerns with pastors having difficulties with establishing appropriate treatment plans, maintaining professional boundaries, and understanding how to handle legal issues such as mandated reporting.

One of the most apparent and applicable points in regards to delineating pastoral counseling and professional clinical counseling appears to be the use of the Office of the Keys. Pastors within their seminary training are encouraged to use a “repentance model” in their pastoral counseling, which uses four stages of the counseling process: objective justification, specific Law, specific Gospel, and fruits of repentance (Schuetze, 2017). This model is effective and professional Christian counselors can benefit from its inclusion within their delivery of services. In instances when mental health does not appear to be directly attributed to a volitional sinful behavior, the use of a “repentance model” can lead a counselee to feel a distance between themselves and God’s grace. For example, a client who is struggling with unwanted same sex attraction and has, through God’s grace, been able to maintain abstinence could be harmed when counseled with a firm and rigid repentance model of counseling. This method may give the impression that the cognitive urges and attraction are fully within the counselee’s cognitive control, and therefore their continued existence suggests a lack of true contrition and repentance. There are many troubled souls that have wrestled with this understanding of how do sexual urges and more broadly, sinful cognitions define them and their sinful state. A more in-depth counseling relationship which continues to remind the client of their dual nature as sinner and saint can provide more comfort and hope.

Pastors appear to have lost some of the significance they have historically had in intimate connections and relationships with their members. Even for regularly attending, involved, and active church members, have you noticed a surface level engagement pattern with



your members? Do you ever feel that your congregation has become a “commuter community” where members only engage when it is convenient with their schedule and with minimal interruption with the rest of their lives? When evaluating the variable of a lack of depth or intimacy in those parishioner relationships, one must understand that this is speaking on an interpersonal and intrapersonal level. Clearly, the administration of Word and Sacrament is the most intimate of relational exchanges as members of the flock are receiving the Means of Grace and engaged in fellowship with Christ and the priesthood of all believers. However, it also appears to be a factor that intimate personal details or crises in the life of the parishioner are not areas of which they feel are under the purview of the pastor. Perhaps this variable of a lack of depth in the pastoral relationship can be attributed to a perceived lack of time. Not only in regards to the time that members make themselves available but also for what pastors allocate for nurturing these relationships. This lack of depth within the pastor-parishioner relationship may also be connected to cultural changes as noted previously with the lack of seeing the church/Scripture as a credible source of authority.

In response to this area, it is wise for pastors to continually think about how they are shepherding their flock and how they are making themselves available for those intimate connections. Pruyser (1976) admonishes pastors for not appreciating the value they can play in a parishioner's life and encourages the use of diagnostic skill in assessing their parishioners. The areas of which he would encourage pastors to be diagnostically assessing their members include: *idolatry* (To what do they place reverence and value?), *providence* (How do they understand the ratio of good will vs. ill will in their lives and to what/whom do they place their trust?), *faith* (How do they view the Bible and its authority in their lives?), *grace* (Do you believe and understand undeserved mercy and its application in your daily lives?), *repentance* (How aware are you of your own sinful state?), *communion* (How embedded, connected, and united are you within the body of Christ?), and *vocation* (Are you a cheerful participant in the sense of purpose attached to your doings and your existence under the Creator?). This diagnostic inventory would serve pastors quite well in collecting and diagnosing their members and cultivating a depth in their *seelsorger* relationships.

In an effort to be relevant and applicable to the masses, congregations have utilized and attempted to integrate secular fields or disciplines within the mission and ministry of the church. Even commenting as a psychologist and one that works full-time in a parasynodical



ministry collaborating with congregations using psychological interventions, I would posit that my discipline is perhaps the most culpable in this regard. The intrusion of psychological material into the work of the church may lead many congregations astray. An overreliance on psychological theories and secular philosophies for church work appears to be motivated by an effort to modernize and make relevant the message of the Gospel. A similar viewpoint is shared by Stanton Jones (2001) when he states, “I share the opinion of many critics of psychology that too many churches are benighted by their seduction into a primarily psychological conception of their mission as a therapeutic mission. They have lost their centeredness on Christ,” and furthermore, “The American Church is becoming consumed with the therapeutic relevance of everything. Christians are always asking ‘Will this make me feel better?’ rather than ‘Is this true? Or ‘Will this bring glory to God?’” (McMinn & Philips, p. 64). We must continue to limit the temptation to be exhaustively lured in by psychological theories and making them the altar of the mission and ministry of the congregation and at the heart of pastoral counseling, “The pastors of America have metamorphosed into a company of shopkeepers, and the shops they keep are churches. They are preoccupied with shopkeeper’s concerns—how to keep the customers happy, how to lure customers away from competitors down the street, how to package the goods so that the customers will lay out more money” (Peterson quoted in Seinkbeil, 2019).

The use of counseling methods or psychological data must always be aligned with and submit with the overall purpose and primary intent of the church. Or as stated by Powlson (2001), “Counseling out to cohere intellectually and structurally with all other forms of the church’s ministry: worship, preaching, teaching, discipleship, child rearing, evangelism, mercy works, and pastoral leadership. Counseling out to operate within the same worldview and with the same agenda as all ministry for Christ” (McMinn & Philips, p. 61).

The continued study of how to be effective as a pastoral counselor suggests that we must continue to learn and apply methods and models that rely on the value of Scripture. The effective collaboration with trained mental health professionals is important but must not be viewed as an opportunity to not be involved in the continued care of the parishioners that you shepherd. [LSQ](#)

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# Devotion on Matthew 5:13: You Are the Salt of the Earth

Donald L. Moldstad  
Chaplain, Bethany Lutheran College  
Mankato, Minnesota

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**Text:** *You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. (Matthew 5:13)*

**W**E PRIMARILY THINK OF SALT AS SOMETHING we use to season our food. However, in ancient times, in Jesus' day, it was also used as a commodity. In fact, the word "salary" comes from the Latin word for salt, since it was often used to pay someone for his work. When slaves were purchased, salt was sometimes used to buy them. The price was determined by the weight of the individual being sold. This is why we hear the expression that someone was not worth his weight in salt.

Jesus uses the picture of this important substance—sodium chloride—to describe how God views the Christian in this world. Those who have been given the gift of faith in Him as their Savior, who place their entire hope of salvation in Him alone, are like this precious element in the world. Those who love Christ, and confess Him as their Savior who died to pay for all their sins, are like salt.

One of the reasons God has given you this gift of faith in Christ is not only for your future benefit, namely to take you to heaven—which is certainly the most important. But He has also done this so you can be a benefit for this world in which you presently live. The Holy Spirit did not take you immediately to heaven after giving you faith. He has intentionally chosen to leave you in this world and use you as an influence on

those around you in your family, with your neighbors, and those in the workplace.

Without the influence and confession of Christians, this world from God's perspective would become nothing but a putrid and rotten pit of decay. It is the presence of believers in Christ, whom God alone has sanctified that seasons our wicked society with a wonderful flavor for God's palate.

Back in the third century, early Christians would sometimes make the sign of the cross on the water in salt when a child was baptized. Others would put a pinch of salt in the mouth of the baby in order to depict this saying from Jesus that this child is now the salt of the world.

Salt has a preserving quality to it as well. Believers in Christ—His Holy Christian Church—will remain in existence until the end of time. In fact, God informs us that He keeps the world going until the final person to be called to faith in Christ is converted. Our heavenly Father will allow His Church of believers to exist until that day, and then the end of the world will come.

Every time we put salt on our food, it can remind us of what Jesus says about His faithful when describing us in the world. It is important that we not lose the wonderful gift of trust in Him as the Savior not only for ourselves, but also for the great benefit that we provide for others by our confession in word and deed. Amen. LSQ

# Sermon on Deuteronomy 18:18–19: The Greater Moses

Gaylin R. Schmeling  
President, Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary  
Mankato, Minnesota

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**Prayer:** O Lord Jesus, in this Advent season, come into our hearts through Your Holy Word and blessed Sacrament that we fully understand Your first coming for our salvation and may be prepared for Your second coming.

**Text:** *I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him (Deuteronomy 18:18–19).*

**W**E ARE IN THE ADVENT SEASON. NOTICE THAT our altar paraments are blue, meaning preparation for the Lord's coming.<sup>1</sup> Advent means coming; Christ's coming to earth as a baby for our salvation, His coming in the hearts of the believers through Word and Sacrament, and His second coming on the Last Day with great power. The circle of the Advent wreath especially reminds us of God's unending love for us and the gift of everlasting life in Jesus. The first candle is the candle of promise, symbolizing all the Old Testament prophesies concerning the Savior. The second candle is the candle of lights or the Bethlehem candle. It reminds us that the light of the world was born in Bethlehem. It also reminds us that the Wise Men were drawn to that light by a guiding star. The third candle is

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon is summary of T. Francis Glasson, *Moses in the Fourth Gospel* (London: SCM Press, 1963).

the love candle. Not only did He come into the world as a human child, but He comes to our hearts through the Word to work faith there. The love candle tells us that Jesus has made our hearts His dwelling place. The fourth candle is the candle of hope. It symbolizes the Christian's great hope of eternal life when Jesus will come again in glory to take us home to be with Him. Finally, the center candle is the Christ candle. This candle tells us that the prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus. He is indeed the Savior and the light of the world. This morning we will meditate on the great prophecies concerning His first Advent. Let us consider this theme: **A Prophet Like Moses, Only Greater.**

**I. Both performed great miracles.** Our text could easily be a summary of the entire Gospel of John. Throughout his Gospel, John pictures Jesus as a prophet like Moses. He is the one coming who would tell us all things (John 4:25). Beginning in chapter one, he compares and contrasts Moses and Jesus. He says, "For the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth comes through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Moses was a great prophet. The Law was given through him. The Jews today still honor him as the giver of the Torah, but that Law itself could never save us. Rather the purpose of the Law was to point us to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. The Law only shows us how sinful we are and our desperate need for help. When we try to keep the Law, we see how completely the darkness of sin controls us, and we see our lost condition without the true light of the world Jesus Christ.

Already in their birth, both Moses and Jesus were similar. Both had to be hidden from the rage of a wicked king. When God called Moses into his public office as a leader of Israel, he went before Pharaoh and said, "Let my people go!" (Exodus 5:1). Because Pharaoh refused, the ten plagues befell Egypt. In one of the first of these plagues, Moses changed the waters of Egypt into blood (Exodus 7:14–24). Now what was the first miracle Jesus performed in His public office? At the wedding of Cana, Jesus changed water into wine (John 2).

John compares and contrasts Moses and Jesus. They both changed water, but Moses changed water into blood, a sign of death, while Jesus changed water into wine, a sign of life and joy in the Bible. The Law of Moses with all its demands only brings blood and death, a work righteous religion ending in death. The Gospel of Jesus, however, brings joy and life. It is the new wine of salvation.

As Moses led Israel through the water of the Red Sea into the wilderness for forty years (Exodus 14), so Jesus passed through the

waters of Baptism and was led into the wilderness for forty days (Matthew 3:13-4:11). When the food was running out and the people started to complain, God through Moses gave the people manna from heaven (Exodus 16). It was a bread-like substance, which lay on the ground each morning like the frost. In John 6 we see something similar in Jesus' life. Jesus fed the five thousand with earthly bread, but He did and continues to do something infinitely greater. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). Jesus is the manna that the Jews expected would reappear when the Messiah came. Jesus is the new and greater Moses who gave Himself as the manna from above. Those who ate Moses' manna died, but those who eat of Jesus, the heavenly manna, will live forever. Jesus explains exactly what that bread is when He says, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:51). We eat His flesh and drink His blood whenever we read and study the Word, especially this morning as we receive the Holy Supper. Here is Christ's wonderful promise, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed" (John 6:54-55). The Lord's Supper gives the complete forgiveness of all our sins because here we receive into ourselves the ransom money, the very thing that bought us back from the slavery of sin. Here there is strength for both body and soul, because this is the spiritual food which our faith needs to grow strong and healthy. Finally, here is the assurance of the resurrection of the body and eternal life for here we receive into ourselves His glorified body confirming that we too will arise with glorified bodies.

The other problem that Moses and the people of Israel faced in the wilderness was a lack of water (Exodus 17:1-7). Therefore, God told him to strike a certain rock and water would flow forth for the people. Now Paul sees that that rock was Jesus for he says that they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them and the Rock was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:1-4). Jesus Himself confirms these words for He says, "If a man is thirsty let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37; see also John 4:14). Christ is indeed the water of life. Moses provided water for the body, but Jesus is the living water for the soul. We drink of that fountain by faith in Him as our Savior. Each day we feel the thirst of sin and need to drink again and again at the living fountain flowing to us through Word and Sacrament. Without Him we will dry



up in this present desert. Therefore, He says if you thirst come to me and drink living water through the Word.

**II. Now we will also see that both Moses and Jesus were great deliverers.** While Israel was in the wilderness, the Amalekites attacked. Joshua led Israel's army out to do battle while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up a mountain where they could view the battle. It happened that when Moses held his hands up that Israel was victorious, but when he let them down they began to lose. Therefore, the two others, Aaron and Hur, stood one on each side and Moses in the middle and when Moses tired, they held up the prophet's hands so that Israel won the battle (Exodus 17:8–15). Now John says of another mountain far away, "Here they crucified Him with two others one on each side and Jesus in the middle" (John 19:18). The connection between these two events was made by the early Christians in a letter written shortly after the death of the Apostles:

When war was waged against Israel by men of another nation and that God might remind them when the war was waged against them that for their sins, they were delivered unto death; the spirit said to the heart of Moses that he should make a type of the cross and of Him that was to suffer. Moses then standing on high ground higher than any other, stretched out his hands and so Israel was again victorious.<sup>2</sup>

As Moses' hands, outstretched between two men, delivered Israel from the attacks of the Amalekites, so Jesus' arms outstretched on the cross between two delivered all men from the great attacks of the devil and the power of evil. Without Jesus there was no way that we could do battle against Satan. We would have been his slaves forever in hell. But in the great battle of Calvary Jesus stretched out His hands as Moses and won the battle for us. He crushed the old evil foe under His heel, and then He entered into death tearing it apart so that we would not have to remain in death forever. Jesus Himself said the same to Nicodemus with a different picture. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness [to save those bitten by the poisonous snakes] even so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whosoever believes may in him have eternal life" (John 3:14–15).

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<sup>2</sup> *The Epistle of Barnabas* 12. *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. J. B. Lightfoot, ed. J. R. Harmer (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 148–49.

Finally, Moses in his God-given work of leading Israel out of Egypt is often compared to the shepherd leading His sheep. Isaiah writes, “His people recall the days of old the days of Moses and his people—where is he who brought them through the sea with the shepherd of His flock” (Isaiah 63:11). Likewise Jesus says in John, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me and I will give unto them eternal life” (John 10). Moses was a shepherd, but Jesus is the Good Shepherd who gave His life for us. Moses was Israel’s shepherd, but Jesus is the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the true Israel His holy Church.

He rescues us from the satanic pharaoh and his hordes by bringing us up through the waters of Baptism. Now we are in the wilderness of this present life where we are no more than pilgrims and campers as Israel of old. When we hunger, He feeds us with heavenly manna, the bread of life His true body and blood. When we thirst, He is the spiritual rock from which the living waters flow that can satisfy our every longing and desire. We receive that water as we daily read and study His Word. In this wilderness we face troubles and conflicts all the way. There are economic problems, rising prices, troubles in our family, sickness, failure in the work place, and the death of those most dear. Yet in all this, we are not left as sheep without a shepherd. For Isaiah says, “Like a shepherd he will tend his flock. In his arm he gathers the lambs and carries them to his bosom” (Isaiah 40:11).

In this Advent season, remember His first coming as the greater Moses with outstretched arms to ransom us from sin. Remember He comes to us this morning nourishing us with heavenly manna through the Word and Sacraments. Finally, remember that soon He will come as the greater Joshua to carry us across the Jordan of death to true peace (Hebrews 4:8) in the Promised Canaan of Joy.

Maranatha, Lord Come Quickly! 



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Pastoral Care and Christian Counseling: Role Differentiation and Partnership <i>Joshua Mears</i>	59	4	405
Preaching the Old Testament, Even If You Follow the One-Year Series <i>Shawn D. Stafford</i>	59	4	355
The Word Endures: An Exegetical Analysis of the Doctrinal Controversies of the ELS <i>S. Piet Van Kampen</i>	59	4	307

### Reformation Lectures

#### *Evangelical Lutheran Synod: Three Perspectives*

ELS: A WELS Perspective <i>John M. Brenner</i>	59	1	9
ELS: An LCMS Perspective <i>Lawrence R. Rast, Jr.</i>	59	1	45
ELS: An Introspective <i>Craig A. Ferkenstad</i>	59	1	69

### Sermons

Devotion on Matthew 5:13: You Are the Salt of the Earth <i>Donald L. Moldstad</i>	59	4	423
See What God Can Do With Clay Jars!: Sermon on 2 Corinthians 4:5–12, Commissioning Service for Dr. Michael Smith <i>John J. Petersen</i>	59	1	123
Sermon on Deuteronomy 18:18–19: The Greater Moses <i>Gaylin R. Schmeling</i>	59	4	425

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Sermon on Psalm 23 for the Funeral of George M. Orvick <i>Mark F. Bartels</i>	59	1	135
Sermon on Romans 8:1–4 for the Funeral of Wilhelm W. Petersen <i>Timothy A. Hartwig</i>	59	1	129
Watch Your Mouth!: Sermon on Ephesians 4:29–32 <i>Andrew M. Schmidt</i>	59	1	119





Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary  
6 Browns Court  
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